





MEMOIRS
OF
MADAME LAFARGE.

VOLUME II.

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OF

MADAME LAFARGE;

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MEMOIRS

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MADAME LAFARGE.

CHAPTER I.

It was six in the morning when, with the aged Lalo, I took my place in the lumbering vehicle that was to restore to me the sun's bright face and the pleasant fields. Like a true Parisienne, I know nothing of Paris, and still less of its environs ; so that, after having passed beneath the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, all was new to me. Continually looking through the window, I admired the gay and smiling arbours that decked the roadside-gardens, whose blossoming shrubs and flowers perfumed the air. I admired the fair and graceful Seine, flowing

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between its own fair fields and villages, so different from the same proud Seine, as it sluggishly moves under the bridges of the capital : then came Neuilly, and its charming park ; then St. Germain, with its amphitheatre of forest standing out against the blue horizon.

At a few leagues' distance from Paris, the country, without being less beautiful, assumed a harsher aspect. Flowering shrubs, fragrant but useless, were succeeded by cultivated fields ; the clover was falling under the mower's scythe ; the hay was gathered into sweet-scented heaps ; and fields of standing rye, undulating under the morning breeze, resembled an ocean of ears and corn-flowers.

For the first time I felt all the poetry of spring, away from Villers-Hellon. All the joys of my beloved grandfather returned after the winter. Alas ! he would return no more. My heart failed me. The smiling face of spring appeared to me ungrateful and neglectful. Lalo's thoughts and feelings sympathised with mine, and we were both affected by painful reminiscences.

We reached Pontoise at eleven ; Madame Leautaud had sent her tilbury to meet us there ;

and in a few minutes we arrived at Busagny. This charming little country-house looks as if it had fallen from the dry and sandy hill-side into the valley in which it stands. On one side arises a little eminence planted with tufted trees, which form a thick curtain; on the other, meadows, fields, flowers, and woods repose at its feet, bounded by a little river. This scene delighted me more by its novelty than by its beauty; and the cordiality of my reception left me no reason to regret having at last accepted Marie's pressing invitations.

After breakfast Marie took me to see her son, whose pale and sickly features were set off for the occasion with the cap I had embroidered for him. Then she proposed to accompany me to her sister-in-law's, whose chateau is situated within a few minutes' walk of Busagny.

This was only a contrivance to be alone with me: Madame Leautaud's looks and words shewed me that her mind was oppressed. Were her fears of the past winter realised? had we confided our secret to unworthy keeping? I still believed in our hero. Yet my imagination, struck by Marie's evident anxiety, some-

times saw him step from his pedestal and become one of those men-machines which on the stage are employed to sing two notes, to swing their arms, roll their eyes, and march in processions: and I thought in anguish of my friendship which I had so ridiculously profaned. Filled with vague and indefinite fears, and desirous of putting an end to them by learning the truth, I consented to go immediately, forgetful of my idleness, fatigue, and the heat of the day. Unluckily, however, we were joined by Madame de Nicolai; and so we were compelled to speak of fine weather and wet, and of her daughter's health, which seriously alarmed her.

I was struck on our arrival by the majestic beauty of Osny. This seat, the property of the Lameth family, was given to M. Scipion de Nicolai upon his marriage with Mademoiselle de Beauvoir. It stands on a large gravel terrace, sloping down to an extensive lawn, with a little lake which reflects its image; trees the growth of a century overshadow the winding avenues of the park, while flower-beds near the house enliven the somewhat rigid beauty of the scene.

The interior corresponds with the exterior of the mansion. Long and echoing corridors, a broad grand staircase ornamented with exotics, a chapel, and a Gothic saloon, constitute the princely residence.

Madame Scipion's kind and simple manners form a pleasing contrast with what surrounds her. Neither lovely nor elegant, and without much wit, she charms by her good nature, her gentleness, and anxiety to please. Left an orphan, married for her dower, and neglected by her husband, the secret grief, that manifests itself in her own despondency, adds to her charms, and it is difficult not to love her.

M. Scipion de Nicolai has all the good qualities that make life pleasant to a bachelor, and all the faults that make a married home uncomfortable; delighting especially in dogs, horses, the chase, and betting; shunning the society of women who are only amiable and coquettes in mind, he lives on horseback, at the Jockey Club, and on the Boulevard de Gand.

Madame Scipion's sister was to be married in a few days; and our hostess spoke to us with touching anxiety of her fears and solici-

tude for her happiness. As for Mademoiselle de Beauvoir, pleased with the idea of her approaching marriage, she bestowed less thought on the future than on her wedding-dress and jewels. Her features were pretty and pleasing; not sufficiently beautiful, unfortunately, to make up for a very indifferent figure. She seemed kind and gentle, and behaved with amiable politeness to me, whom she had never seen before.

We returned late from our visit. We had to dress for dinner; and in the evening, being compelled to converse on indifferent topics, I could only squeeze Marie's hand expressively; and on retiring for the night, I felt surprised at the unusual amiability of Mademoiselle Delvaux, who, up to this time, had treated me almost coolly.

The next day I and Marie found ourselves alone at last. M. de Leautaud was away on an angling excursion; Madame de Nicolai was occupied in superintending her gardeners. We shut ourselves up in my room; and I was on the point of interrogating Marie respecting her distress, when she said abruptly, that "she wished me to marry." This unexpected ad-

dress took me completely by surprise, and I was unable to utter a word. Without, however, awaiting any reply, Madame de Leautaud proceeded to speak of the reasons that should govern my decision; pointing out to me the void in my existence, and describing the falseness and dependence of my position in respect to the world.

“You have no fortune, and are almost twenty-three,” she added; “a good marriage can alone confer in society that liberty necessary to your character. Listen seriously while I remind you of certain disagreeable but wholesome truths. Your health is not good, and the nature of your complaint does not add to your beauty; you will soon be an old maid, as dissatisfied with yourself as you will be disagreeable to others. Avert this by becoming an amiable wife. You would not hear me last winter, and evaded the subject every time I attempted to speak on it. Now I have caught you; and here, away from the influence of your aunts, I am determined to persuade you to make up your mind, and to make you happy in spite of yourself.”

I listened in mute astonishment to the sud

den proposition, and Madame Leautaud's conjugal harangue. Guessing instinctively that this extraordinary solicitude on my account only veiled her real object, I answered, somewhat impatiently, that she was very kind; and expressing my sensibility of good intentions, declared my willingness to obey, provided the husband suited me.

“ Perhaps you have high expectations, and romantic notions of love? Confess to me what you would accept, and I will afterwards tell you whom I propose.”

“ You know, Marie, I no longer believe in love as described by the poets, and as we imagine it in our dreams. I am resigned to take the world as it is, and consent to marry for worldly reasons. But you must understand, that, if I do not exact a handsome husband, a refined and affectionate mind, and a heart all passion; if I determine to make a reasonable choice reasonably, I am justly entitled to regard, as indispensable in the party whom I shall accept, an honourable position in the world, fortune, and an estimable and established character. I shall be indulgent as to his age; I would even consent to immure myself in a castle, or

dwell in a country town ; for I am of Cæsar's opinion, and would prefer being first in a village to living second in Rome."

"Excellent ! my project tallies admirably with your views. You will *reign*, for the husband whom I have chosen for you is a sub-prefect : his age is thirty-eight ; he has no fortune, but his hopes of advancement are certain. He is good-looking and clever, and his name is George,—a pretty name, is it not ? In short, he is Mademoiselle Delvaux's brother."

I was satisfied with all this, except the conclusion ; and I could not disguise from Marie that it would be as difficult for me to love Mademoiselle Delvaux as to obtain her affection. To re-assure me, she told me that her governess's opinion of me was changed ; that she now recognised her injustice, loved me with all her heart, and was the first who had desired this marriage, which was to make me her sister.

I promised to reflect on the inconveniences attending my position, in order the better to appreciate the advantages of the step proposed for my welfare ; and when, farther, I almost accepted the match, so far as the position of

the party was concerned, and promised to prepare to listen favourably to his personal overtures, Marie could no longer conceal her extreme joy, and embraced me tenderly.

“Your sinister and mysterious air at first quite alarmed me,” said I; “I almost feared that your terrors of the past winter had retaken possession of you, and knew not what horrible phantom you had conjured up to test my friendship.”

“Your friendship and affection are more necessary to me than ever. My former vague fears have become threatening realities. But you will save me; you have assured me you will save me.”

Madame de Leautaud then informed me that her husband was exceedingly jealous, still more of appearances than of her love; that a person whom he had formerly loved, and who still possessed influence over him, revenged herself for his neglect, by wounding his vanity in the reputation of the woman who had been preferred to her. Already had M. de Leautaud reproved her with asperity for some girlish indiscretions; and she foresaw that he would never forgive the intrigue with M. Clavé, which

was at the same time a blemish and a subject for ridicule.

“Tell me at once,” said I, “whether M. Clavé is really in Africa—as I am convinced he is—or at the Opera, as you were so certain in the winter?”

“Once more, I repeat that he is at the Opera. I recognised him distinctly among a group of chorus-singers; and that his name is on the list, Mademoiselle Delvaux is as certain as myself.”

“I am still incredulous. To the perhaps deceptive evidence of your eyes, I have the more tangible proof of a letter to oppose. Why would you not suffer me to answer it? We should have known by this time whether to fear him or to forget him.”

“You have not reflected, Marie, that he only dated his letter from Algiers the more easily to obtain your answer, and to remove from your mind all thoughts of its compromising you. Believe me, he is at this moment a *figurant* at the Opera in Paris.”

“It may be so, but I am unable to believe it; and even should I compromise myself still further, I am resolved to write to him in Al-

giers,—if only to convince you, and to set your mind at rest.”

“Do no such thing, I entreat you—I implore—”

“Then confess that you have seen him, that you have written to him.”

“No, indeed,” said Madame de Leautaud with excitement. “I have obtained the most positive information respecting his circumstances, which are indeed deplorable: he is plunged in debt, and hiding from his creditors. His object is to enter society; and he is just the sort of person to make use of a scandalous intrigue as a passport; in a word, to ruin us by exposing our letters. Your family will be covered with obloquy through your inconsiderate folly; while M. de Leautaud will probably demand a separation to save himself from the ridicule which in overwhelming me would reflect upon him. I could never survive the blow. No sacrifice is too great to prevent the possibility of such a disclosure. For Heaven’s sake, assist me, Marie—save me, in saving yourself.”

I confess that all this shocked me extremely. Madame de Leautaud’s fears gradually commu-

nicated themselves to me. I felt that she was hiding from me a secret—perhaps an interview, or a letter. What was I to imagine? Between a young woman and a young wife no perfect confidence can exist. I dared not question Marie; I dared not probe her secret; I knew not how I could *protect* her, still less how I could save her. Taking her hands in silence, I gave her time to collect herself, to speak more calmly.

Marie had, in fact, formed a scheme, counselled, or at least countenanced, by Mademoiselle Delvaux; and upon hearing it, my terror became excessive.

At the time of her marriage she had received a set of diamonds; and her project was, to dispose of these, to employ the proceeds in arranging M. Clavé's affairs, purchasing back the letters, and sending him from France,—and thus put it out of his power to betray us by an indiscreet disclosure, which, unsupported by proof, would be incredible.

The project appeared to me at once dangerous and impracticable. I could bring myself to doubt the noble sentiments of frankness and honour with which my friendship had en-

dowed M. Clavé; I could believe him unfortunate; that, compelled to have recourse to the stage for bread, he might have been tempted, in a momentary fit of desperation, to threaten Marie with revenge for her neglect and contempt: but depraved, or unprincipled, I could not believe him. I did not believe him capable of saying to a woman whom he had loved,—“Gold is as necessary to me as honour to you: purchase my silence, or I will ruin your reputation.”

I told Marie all that passed in my mind. I supplicated her not to wound M. Clavé's feelings by such a proposition, nor herself drive him to the very steps that it was her object to prevent his taking. Neither could I see how I could be of service to her; I could only advise—nor was my judgment to be relied on in a dangerous or difficult emergency.

Marie entreated me, with the most urgent entreaties, to banish for ever all my romantic illusions of the noble-minded chevalier of past times. She solemnly assured me that she was fully justified in believing in M. Clavé's want of honour; that she could, and ought to purchase his silence. She told me that M. Del-

vaux was to be let into our secret—in short, his future bride's reputation, and his sister's peace, which would both be compromised, if Madame de Nicolai should discover the intrigue, made us certain of his concurrence and discretion. When unset, the diamonds would no longer be recognisable. I was to pretend to have received them from an old uncle, and to sell them previously to my marriage, in order to purchase less-expensive jewels for that occasion: all which, she said, would appear too natural to awaken suspicion.

I was, however, far from satisfied; and without daring positively to refuse Marie, I sought to raise objections, and to oppose difficulties, that I might avoid taking part in this imprudent course. I pointed out to her that she might, with equal safety, confide her secret directly to M. Delvaux, through his sister; and expressed myself at a loss to understand how I could be so indispensably necessary an agent in a project of which I disapproved.

“Your heedlessness and inexperience blind you,” replied she. “Mademoiselle Delvaux, who is willing to assist me even beyond the extent of merely advising, would never consent

to serve me directly. That which in an unmarried girl amounts to nearly unpardonable giddiness, would in a person at her time of life, enjoying my mother's confidence, and entrusted with a sacred responsibility, be accounted an act of infamy. As for M. Delvaux, a man cannot oppose himself to a man in an affair of this kind. You alone can unite the moral influence of the second Marie to the influence of hard cash of the first; you only can receive my letters, and make known my conditions. While the least step on my part would add arms to those already possessed by M. Clavé, yours cannot compromise you; for he could have no interest to divulge it; and authorised by M. Delvaux, no one could presume to blame your conduct. No one but you can undertake the conveyance of the money to M. Clavé, in the form of a pension, if we should be unable to trust him so far as to pay him all at once."

I yielded, and promised all that was required of me; too weakly forgetting that it is not permitted to repair the evil consequences of one false step by another.

CHAPTER II.

WE frequently renewed our conversation respecting M. Clavé. Marie's terror and despair infected me more and more every day; and I gradually became almost reconciled to the marriage she proposed. In our long and solitary walks we were accustomed to speak of it as a matter finally settled. I was not indifferent to my future role of "*préfette*," for in our plans M. Delvaux's protectors invariably promoted him to a prefecture upon his marriage. I saw myself in imagination doing the honours of an entertainment, and gaining the good opinion of all the proprietors in my husband's department, to be directed into the proper channel on occasion of the elections; I visited the poor and the schools; I was blessed by the wretched, esteemed by my husband, and — in short, the flattering dream was com-

plete, and I succeeded in engrafting a romance on the common-place life that would have fallen to my lot on the realisation of Marie's project of marriage.

At times, however, my resolution failed. When I spoke of my marriage with doubt, timidity, or sorrow, Marie, calling in aid a thousand little seductive arts, spoke to me of our return to Paris, of our renewed and strengthened friendship, of the splendour of the capital, and of my bride's-clothes. Then she would revert to her project of the diamonds, foretelling its realisation and its consequences; anticipating with delight the happy day when, shut up together, we should once more reperuse our redeemed *billets-doux* previously to offering them up an *auto-da-fè* to our peace of mind. In short, without convincing my reason, she forestalled every objection.

The country air, exercise, and amusement, soon restored my health. I seldom suffered pain, and added to my diet occasionally strawberries, some excellent cheese, and milk which we went to the farm to drink, warm and frothy from the cow.

The life I led was agreeable and diversified

enough. I arose late, and the breakfast-bell summoned me from my room. Marie and I shut ourselves up to work in the library, or walked in the park,—always alone, for M. de Leautaud spent his mornings in tracing a plan, out on horseback, or quietly angling for gudgeons in the brook. At four o'clock, Marie visited her son in the nursery, and I seated myself at the piano until the first dinner-bell. After dinner, we chatted on the terrace, or played at billiards, or sang, until we separated for the night, which was my time for reading and correspondence.

Madame de Leautaud, desirous of doing the honours of her neighbourhood, took me to Pontoise, a pretty little town built on a smiling hill-side, with a Gothic cathedral, offering handsome façades and charming specimens of the architecture of the middle ages;—then to visit M. de G * * *, at his seat a few leagues from Busagny.

The morning we selected for this latter excursion was oppressively warm; dense masses of cloud rapidly gathered, dark and threatening, immediately over our heads. Soon vivid flashes of lightning, preceding heavy peals of

thunder, were succeeded by torrents of rain that wetted us to the skin before we arrived. A gate opening into the high street of the village admitted the carriage into a gloomy paved yard; and upon alighting we were ushered into a spacious half-darkened drawing-room, with furniture of fifty years' standing; an host of the same age gravely welcomed us with the air of one awaking from a dream.

We arrived laughing heartily at our disasters on the road: but the fixed and unhappy look of the owner of the mansion produced a sudden and general reaction. A walk in the garden was proposed. We found the walks carefully raked, and without the trace of a footstep; the very trees had for me a mournful and dishevelled air, raindrops for tears falling fast from the leaves; while not a flower was in blossom.

I communicated my impressions to Madame de Leautaud; and she replied, — “ M. de G * * * is my father's friend: I frequently see him, and always as you see him now. It is whispered that in very early life our neighbour married a charming girl, with every prospect of happiness. Up to his wedding-day,

M. de G * * * was the happiest of men and the tenderest of lovers ; the day after, he was no longer seen to smile, and his eye had grown cold and dull. His young wife never quitted her room, and a year afterwards died, after having given birth to a son."

Marie could satisfy my curiosity no further ; a painful mystery seemed to chill the place, and I left it sorrowfully affected, and a prey to profound emotion.

CHAPTER III.

M. DELVAUX arrived on a Saturday evening, to sign the contract, and Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's marriage was to take place the following Monday. My heart beat violently as I entered the room that contained my *possibly* future husband. Without being old, he was no longer young; very light hair, very blue eyes, and very rosy cheeks, composed a calm and complacent set of features in which nothing could reasonably be objected to: his form was imposingly obese, and his slow and measured language strongly characteristic of the sub-prefect.

In the course of this first evening Madame de Leautaud contrived us a thousand little opportunities to speak to each other. He did not converse very well; but the few words with which he interrupted the tedium of reading the contract were well received; and when Marie

asked me what I thought of him, I replied that time was necessary to enable me to form an opinion, but that in the meanwhile he did not displease me.

The next day was Palm-Sunday; and after having attended mass in the chapel at Osny, Marie led me into the park. She was in triumphant spirits,—the success of the candidate of the previous evening having left no doubt in her mind of the fortunate issue of her project. I had not said “nay;” and as for M. Delvaux, he had said “aye” as plainly as man could speak; and she had decided that this day of festivity, of confusion and preparation, should answer for the disappearance of her diamonds.

It was no easy matter for her thus to rob herself. The jewels were kept in the drawer of a bureau, of which she alone possessed a key; the passage that led to her room led to no other; it was impossible for a stranger to invent a pretext for passing that way; it would therefore be necessary to suppose that a strange thief, knowing exactly where the diamonds were kept, had chosen his time to force the drawer, regardless of danger, and fearless of a sudden

surprise, against which he could not guard, and from which escape would have been impossible.

To prevent suspicion falling on the people of the house, it was necessary to make some of these improbabilities appear probable—to find, therefore, a pretext for removing the diamonds from the drawer and taking them down into the drawing-room, and to leave them there without too palpable negligence.

These indispensable circumstances, so difficult to combine, almost naturally presented themselves this day. Of that, I was aware; and notwithstanding my desire not to understand it, I had consequently only faint objections to urge: I could object to the project, but retard or prevent its execution I could not; the hour was come, and it must either be renounced for ever, or carried into prompt and immediate execution.

I had recourse, in despair, to the information it was necessary to obtain regarding M. Delvaux: I remarked that my aunts might oppose obstacles to my wishes, that I was naturally anxious to know something of him who was to be my future lord and master, &c. But

Marie having met and overcome every one of my scruples, once more I yielded.

After dinner we led the conversation to Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's wedding-presents, and subsequently introduced the subject of her diamonds. Marie expressed her preference of Lecointe's style of setting to that of Jeanisset; and sending for her jewel-case in support of her opinion, its truth was quickly admitted, and due honour ascribed to M. Lecointe's good taste.

The drawing-room was soon deserted; Madame de Nicolai went to walk in the garden; MM. de Nicolai and de Leautaud were, I believe, obliged to go to Pontoise on business; vespers called the ladies to church; while some of the domestics were engaged at Osny, making preparations for the next day; and others had errands to perform in the town. In short, all being abandoned and in disorder in the little castle, Marie placed her jewel-case on a work-table that stood near the low windows opening on the outer yard, and before which beggars were accustomed to solicit alms that were never refused. Afterwards, while M.

Delvaux was engaged whispering in my ear amorous assurances of a sub-prefect's love, Marie quickly removed her diamonds from their case, and took them up stairs to her room, to avoid the risk of having our plan executed by a real thief. Then we in our turn quitted the room, and took a long walk together.

We were absent three hours. Upon our return, as we had hoped and foreseen, we found no one in the drawing-room, and the case was ostensibly removed by Madame de Leautaud. By way of additional precaution, Marie asked her mother in the evening whether during our long absence she had entered the saloon; and the reply was in the negative. M. Alfred de Gouy, who had been the only visitor during the general absence, had made the house re-echo with his cries; and after having bawled himself hoarse, and left the house in despair, had been met in the park by Madame de Nicolai.

To neglect no means of justification, Madame de Leautaud left the key in the lock of the diamond-drawer; and as the domestics on fête-days, and such extraordinary occasions as the

preparations for the marriage at Osny, were scarcely ever at Busagny, suspicion would naturally light on a stranger.

In the evening that followed this great conspiracy, although M. Delvaux was openly very amorous and extremely attentive, I was so pre-occupied by the thoughts of the steps we had taken, and the sad impressions inspired by Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's approaching marriage, that Marie, perceiving it, led me out to walk on the terrace ; and, wishing to dispel my dark forebodings, began talking about Mdme. de N * * *, who was expected. I knew this lady to be a votary of high fashion, and feared that she would be dissatisfied and disdainful ; but Marie assured me that we had nothing of the sort to apprehend, and related to me her melancholy and affecting story.

Madame de M * * *, forgetful of a husband by whom she was adored, and their infant, permitted the dishonourable addresses of M. de F * * *, and soon returned his passion. Madame de N * * * at her birth was clandestinely removed by M. de F * * *, and confided to his wife, an angelic creature, who lavished the most tender cares on the infant,

and continued to nurse it with disinterested and affectionate solicitude, until Madame de M * * *, separated from her husband, could herself take charge of her child. Madame de M * * * having no fortune, was compelled to build all hopes of her daughter's future prospects on an admirable voice; and the child was educated accordingly. Occasionally the mother saw her son: separated by the world, the brother and sister were not divided in their hearts; and after Madame de M * * * 's death, her poor orphan found a welcome refuge in her brother's strong affection.

The young man's conduct was above all praise. Adored by his father, he exerted all his influence to make him love and appreciate his sister, and succeeded in procuring that she should share with him their parent's name, fortune, and affection.

I found Madame de N * * * amiable, beautiful, and of pleasing manners; she sang with refined talent and an admirable facility of execution. Having both of us received lessons from Madame de Lina Freppa, the discourse turned on music, and we were soon almost friends.

As for M. de N * * *, he appeared to me too conscious of his personal charms to care about pleasing by his conversation. He spoke well on matters relating to art, very ordinarily on fashionable topics, and worse than indifferently on grave and serious subjects. A violent Carlist, his was one of those enthusiastic devotions to the cause, that invent mottoes and go the length of wearing a cravat of its party's colours.

Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's marriage was solemnised in the church at Busagny. The bride preserved throughout the ceremony her happy equanimity, while her sister was agitated by the most lively anxiety. The bridegroom, M. de G * * *, was far from appearing either happy or even cheerful : I felt for him ; for Marie had explained to me the cause of his misery. Brought up almost together, he had passionately loved Marie, had offered her his hand and his heart, and had been rejected. The news of her marriage with M. de Leautaud reaching him at Vienna, where he had sought oblivion of the past, a dangerous fit of illness ensued. M. de G * * * was handsome, with a noble countenance, a distinguished

figure, and agreeable manners,—in a word, far superior in every respect to M. de Leautaud; yet with the melancholy inconsistency of the human heart, he was unhappy in his love, and, as if in revenge, gained the affections of an amiable young girl to whom he was utterly indifferent. Why, O God! this continual path of suffering? why these conflicting affections, which destroy your feeble creatures?

A stranger to these ordered joys and secret griefs, I sat apart, turning over the leaves of some albums spread over the drawing-room table. A young gentleman, solitary and mournful like myself, shared my amusement: an exchange of books and common-place remarks led our thoughts into unison. He was Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's cousin, and her guardian's son; and he was mortified by the indifferent welcome extended to him, and the neglect with which his father was treated. M. de Beauvoir was talented and well-educated, and possessed the most noble sentiments; he made me forget that the hours were long, and that I should therefore find them wearisome. He sat near me during an interminable dinner; and in the evening, during the fireworks in honour of the

wedding, he was again by my side. We almost became intimate friends; and upon his leaving, I parted from him with regret.

Marie was very satirical the next morning on the subject of my conquest of the day before; and finding fault with me for having tolerated attentions not from M. Delvaux, expressed herself in language almost amounting to reproof. This foretaste of matrimonial despotism inspired me with discouraging reflections. However, M. Delvaux's sedulous attention and his sister's tenderness gradually restored me to my former indifference. In a few days they both set out for Paris, M. Delvaux expressing himself desirous of a definite answer, and professing a due share of amorous impatience. Madame de Leautaud spoke for me; replying that my decision would depend upon my family and the advice of my friends, and that I had no personal objection.

I wrote to my aunts, to announce the husband who would present himself for their approval; and to the Marquess of Mornay, whose generous character and excellent judgment made me anxious to have his advice. I begged

him to procure information at the Ministère de l'Intérieure; and conjured him, by his friendship for my mother, to assist my irresolution by his good counsel.

CHAPTER IV.

I HAD been three weeks at Busagny ; Madame de Montbreton urged my departure, to accelerate my arrival at Corcy ; and I only waited for answers from my aunts and M. de Mornay, to set out. Although my position induced me to consent to a marriage of convenience, I secretly hoped that obstacles would break off the match, and many causes conspired to strengthen my wishes.

M. Delvaux's political opinions seemed to me narrow-minded, and formed in servile imitation of those of the ministry for the time being, whatever its shade of politics or character might be. He understood nothing of the royalists' devotion to long-tried institutions, nor of the patriotism of the liberal, who anticipates the future. Intolerant of discussion, to support his principle of blind and implicit obedience to

the ruling powers of the day, he would admit no other argument than coercion. Moreover, M. Delvaux, having to return in a few weeks to his duties, was desirous that the ceremony should take place immediately; and that terrified me. I durst not confide my fears to Marie. Her ideas on the subject of matrimony were most arbitrary; she professed it as her opinion that a husband should be accepted without discussion; and met my least word expressive of opposition by sarcastic and offensive reflections on my lofty pretensions. In short, to avoid her ill-temper and my secret irresolution, I abandoned myself to the decision of my relatives, to the advice of my friends, and to the grace of God.

Differing from me, Marie wished to contrive the discovery of the supposititious robbery of the jewels with as little delay as possible; while I was of opinion that we had better take our time, and wait till the winter,—which seemed to me the more advisable plan. The jewel-case, as I have said, was kept in a drawer of which she alone possessed the key; and as, in the country, she was certain of having no occasion to wear her diamonds, it was much easier

therefore to let them lie forgotten, than to find a means of calling attention towards them, and then to establish the fact of their theft without suspicion of the real fact. Marie thought differently. She did not wish to be alone to bear the first shock. In six months I should be away from her in some distant department; all our elaborate arrangement to screen the servants from suspicion would by that time have been forgotten or easily overthrown, and she could not endure the terrible prospective. She told me that I could not be capable of abandoning her in the hour of danger; insisting that my presence was necessary to support her—my sympathy to save her from sinking under her fears; and, finally, that our momentous resolution required to be promptly executed.

I still adhered to my original opinion; but as it originated in a mixed sentiment of weakness and selfishness, which I was half ashamed to avow, I yielded; and we resolved that on the next day, which was a Sunday, we would deliver ourselves from all further anxiety by a bold and decisive step.

Marie, on pretence of having a few lines to

write, contrary to her custom, stepped up stairs to her apartment in the middle of the day, begging M. de Leautaud and me, as we were disengaged, to accompany her, and take our seats in her comfortable *causeuses*. The conversation we presently turned on Bourguignon's well-imitated false jewellery; which I pronounced to be so perfect, that at a short distance it could not be distinguished from real stones; instancing several leaders of fashion, who, possessing superb diamonds, often wore them with Bourguignon's paste without observation. Marie maintaining the contrary, we appealed for a decision to M. de Leautaud; and I offered to produce for comparison with her diamonds the clasp of my missal, which was ornamented with some of the strass-paste. I fetched it; Marie opened the drawer, took out her jewel-case, and, to her consternation, found it—empty.

An inquiry and search were immediately instituted. The lady's maid being sent for, declared that she had never seen the jewels "since the day that Madame had sent for them in the drawing-room." Marie then remembered that on that occasion she had placed

them on the work-table, and, through unaccountable forgetfulness, had there left them during several hours while we were out walking. She had a distinct recollection of having carried the case up stairs on her return, and also of having hastily put it away, without first ascertaining by inspection that the diamonds were all safe within. There was no longer any doubt that they had been stolen by a beggar or a vagabond; and all the accessory circumstances that we could recal to mind strengthened and confirmed this belief. We remembered having been a very long time away, and having pushed the table near the window to waltz a little after dinner; that all the domestics were absent; that the case on the table could be plainly seen, and easily reached, through the open window; that we had observed several men of suspicious appearance in the neighbourhood, &c.

Frantic at the consequence of his wife's negligence, M. de Leautaud upbraided her with the harshest reproaches. He ransacked every drawer, overwhelmed us with questions, and searched all our work-baskets in the drawing-room; while Marie and I stood apart in con-

sternation, which increased when we heard of M. de Nicolai's intention of sending to the magistrates for two gendarmes to search all the servants' rooms.

The evening was spent in conjectures and recriminations, M. de Nicolai alone preserving his temper. As for M. de Leautaud, he was raving ; and after having exhausted the language of passionate reproof, and suspecting nearly every body in turn, learning that M. Alfred de Gouy had been some short time alone on the deserted premises on the memorable Palm-Sunday, he seriously persuaded himself that he had taken the diamonds to present to one of his mistresses : and it was long before he would retract, with an ill grace, this insulting and unjustifiable suspicion.

All that night my terror for the consequences of our imprudence was unbounded ; and the next morning I declared to Marie, that no earthly power should induce me to retain possession of her jewels (which had been hidden for some days in my room) while the officers of justice were in the house. I wished her to take them back again, and entreated her to renounce her project, if it were not yet too

late. Unfortunately, she was not to be convinced. The immediate danger seemed to frighten her much less than the prospective. Her anxiety, it is true, equalled mine; but she could devise no means to have the diamonds found in a natural way, and believed that having advanced so far, the slightest hesitation would entail irreparable consequences.

Marie could not succeed in calming me; but her prayers and entreaties deprived me of courage to abandon her to herself. What was to be done with the fatal diamonds? To conceal them in her apartment was impossible: her attendant turned topsy-turvy every thing in it twenty times an hour; and M. de Leautaud had made it the theatre of his interminable perquisitions, his despair, and loquacious invective against his wife: there was not a nook or corner safe from his prying investigation; and although I felt the extent of my poor friend's anguish, I confess that I had no courage to keep her dangerous deposit. On a sudden, while we were perplexing ourselves for an expedient in this perilous emergency, we heard

the gendarmes' swords clanking on the hall-pavement, and it became necessary to act.

We were conversing in my room, and had barely time to hide them in a pair of long gloves and thrust these precipitately under the cushion of an arm-chair, into which Marie then threw herself. And so, with failing hearts and a smile on our features, we awaited the issue of this terrible judicial visit.

Who can describe our sufferings while the gendarmes were prosecuting their researches? Every step seemed directed towards us, every question to be addressed to us, every look to watch us. Seated together at the door of my room, which we had left open in order to appear to be observing with interest what was passing, we experienced a degree of terror amounting to the most painful torture all the time of the minute investigation of the gendarmes. Alas! how vain and weak are struggles against remorse and conscious guilt!

Nor did our tribulation cease upon the departure of the dreaded instruments of law: another determination became immediately necessary; for to conceal the diamonds with

their setting was impossible. I had no hiding-place for them. All my keys were kept by Lalo, my cashier and my confidante, who unscrupulously, and with the chartered impunity of an old and faithful personal attendant, detected and shared half my secrets, read all the letters that I did not shew her, and informed herself of whatever I might have wished to withhold from her knowledge. This Marie knew; but still more unwilling to take Lalo into our confidence than to release me from my trust, she resolved to destroy the setting of the jewels, and to convert her rich ornaments into unsightly and common-looking little stones.

We applied ourselves to this work in my room, with penknives and scissors for tools. The task was a laborious one, and we were very clumsy: we even tore our hands in several places, heroically bearing the pain without complaint or relenting. Fortunately, when we came to the larger diamonds, the idea occurred to us of breaking up the setting with our feet; and so we facilitated and accelerated the rest of the work without further lacerating our hands.

While thus employed, we spoke of M. Del-

vaux, of my coming marriage, my wedding-presents, and the entertainments; for Marie, seeing me anxious and terrified at the least noise, wished to amuse me and to distract my attention. I remarked, as I wrenched off a largish pearl, that it seemed the younger sister of one we had admired in an enamel ring worn by the Countess de Courval.

“It is not perfectly round,” said Marie, “which impairs its value; and perhaps remounted on a ring its defect would be conspicuous. But if you admire and will accept it, I shall be extremely gratified.”

“Thank you,” replied I, laughing; “but that would be robbing our hero.”

“An excellent fancy strikes me. My jewels are in some sort the first cause of your marriage; and determined I am to select from them your wedding-present—a souvenir to unite our past girlish intimacy with our future more womanly friendship. The large pearl shall be your George. Here are four smaller ones, which we will name after the persons of our wretched drama: this, the worst looking, shall be M. Clavé; this, Mademoiselle Delvaux; and here are the two Maries.”

Although I laughed good-humouredly at this sally, I refused to accept the pearls. "Nay," said Marie, her temper rising, "it is a wedding-gift, and you shall in return make me another, which I promise not to refuse. Will not that be like an exchange? . . . You still object; then I propose another arrangement. I am, you know, indebted to you in a little sum I borrowed: take the five pearls in payment, and we are quits."

"On those terms I do not mind accepting them."

"Thanks. Here they are; put them away apart from the rest."

The dinner-bell put a stop to our unfinished labours for that day; and as there was company, wishing that our late appearance should not be remarked, we hastened to conceal the jewels between the lining of a reticule, leaving some with part of their setting attached. The next day, Marie would have ended our work; but I opposed it, partly through idleness; telling her, as she observed me closely, that the fragments of the setting would make them easily recognised, and adding that we should remove it all before offering them for sale.

While Lalo was undressing me that evening, I asked her what effect was produced below stairs by the discovery of the theft, and the steps that had been taken in consequence. She told me that all the domestics were in consternation, and openly expressed their discontent at Madame de Leautaud's negligence in leaving property of such enormous value exposed in the drawing-room to the first comer; as also their indignation at the conduct of her attendant in not having removed the key from her mistress's drawers while the wedding-entertainments were celebrating at Osny; thus subjecting them to the humiliating researches of the police, and the still more humiliating suspicions of the family. I also understood that M. de Nicolai's suspicions having lighted on a recently-engaged domestic, named Stephen, the poor man was in the utmost distress, fearing a discharge without character, and the consequent ruin of himself, his wife, and family.

The grief of this poor man, whom I knew to be innocent, yet knew not how to clear from suspicion, strongly affected me. I had believed myself guilty of an action imprudent and blame-

able only; but when I rigorously examined my conduct, the feelings of remorse which I experienced were so intolerable, that forgetful of every thing but poor Stephen's misfortune, I charged Lalo to console him by assuring him from me that so far from doubting his probity, if he should be compelled to leave Busagny, I would recommend him to my aunts, who among their numerous friends would certainly provide him with a good situation. I sent him my address, in order, by insuring his application to me, to retain certain means to repair the involuntary injury I had done him; and I further promised to speak in his favour to Madame de Leautaud. The next day I endeavoured to communicate these sentiments of repentance to Marie, and earnestly besought her courageously to support an innocent man, our victim, against the unjust suspicions of her family. She promised compliance; but weak and forgetful in the extreme, she either forgot or shrank from fulfilling her engagement.

The answers I expected from Paris, as to my marriage, arrived. My aunts recommended me not to be precipitate; representing the position

of a fortuneless sub-prefect as very precarious. M. de Mornay was more precise. He wrote me that M. Delvaux's future prospects were not promising—that he had nothing to hope, and every thing to fear: the information the Marquess had obtained was by no means favourable; and shortly advising a refusal, my mother's noble friend supported his advice by unanswerable reasoning.

Marie's indignation at this intelligence knew no bounds. She ridiculed my firm confidence in M. de Mornay, declared that his intervention was ill-timed and most improper, attacked his arguments, &c. Madame de Nicolai also thought proper to inflict upon me a jeremiad of formidable length and asperity. In short, I was harassed all day by their offensive remarks, turning continually upon my dependent position, which, according to them, left me no liberty of choice, and made it my duty to accept with gratitude the first offer.

A poor girl can suffer no worse martyrdom than the persecution of friends bent upon providing her with a husband. They would make her happy in spite of herself; and there is no

pardon for her who revolts against the panacea of happiness with which friendship would drug her on these occasions.

Sad and weary, and desirous of leaving Busagny, the next day, I told Marie that my marriage with M. Delvaux being broken off, I would return to her the diamonds. Unable to control her passion at this, she accused me of an intention to ruin her—reproached me with abandoning her in revenge for a few angry words prompted by the warmth of her friendship. She said tauntingly that I had never loved her; that I had filled her head with M. Clavé, and now left her to support alone the consequences of an indiscretion that I had shared; that my conduct was selfish, cruel, malignant. Then followed a torrent of tender reproaches and entreaties, which unfortunately had far more influence than her invective over my resolution.

I was heart-broken. I tried in vain to calm her, in vain I sought to make her comprehend that my position being a thousand times more dependent than hers, it would be impossible for me to assist her; that I knew no jewellers; that I never went out alone; that I should have no

opportunity of seeing M. Clavé, even to give him the diamonds themselves, and still less of sending them, without taking Lalo into our confidence.

Although compelled to admit the truth of all this, Marie still asked me to retain the jewels until she could find an opportunity to convert them into money; and to justify her request, urged the impossibility of keeping them herself—the absence of Mademoiselle Delvaux, of whose advice and assistance she would be deprived for six whole months—and, finally, the insignificance of the favour asked at my hands—simply to keep a reticule in one of my drawers. Almost ashamed of myself for not having married to assist Madame de Leautaud, I consented to accept the less important part she now proposed, with more vexation than serious anxiety.

I stayed a few days longer at Busagny. Madame de Leautaud determined herself to accompany me to Paris; and the journey proved a most delightful one. After threading, on a fine June morning, the shady avenues of the forest of St. Germain, we exchanged our light britzka and rapid horses for the railway-

train; and were soon whirled to Paris by all-powerful steam, the favourite Pegasus of the practical philosophers of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after, I set out for Corcy, where I was received with the most affectionate welcome by Madame de Montbreton. I related to her the matrimonial project of her sister, complaining in mild terms of Marie's asperity, and her mother's harsh censure of my refusal. Madame de Montbreton approved my conduct, denouncing the match as a most ineligible one, according to her ideas; M. Delvaux having no fortune, his position being precarious, his family plebeian, and his own nullity being incontestable.

“My dear child,” she added, “Marie would have thrown you away upon her governess's brother; but you must not bear malice. You know my mother only sees with *her* eyes; that my sister has hardly common sense; and

she is so thoughtless for herself, that it may be easily forgiven her being so for others.”

My first return to Villers-Hellon awakened many painful reminiscences, and cost me abundance of bitter tears.

When, in former years, I had returned after the winter, I used to spring from the carriage to meet my venerable grandfather, to kiss his silvery hair and return his warm smile; to embrace all my old nurses, who half-stifled me with their caresses, and deafened me with their questions. Then I revisited every room in the house: first, my little tower; next, my own apartment; thence I ran to the drawing-room, and from the drawing-room into the garden. I wished to see my good peasants, my own favourite trees, and my pets in the poultry-yard and stable,—all at once. I experienced unspeakable happiness in living to behold again all the objects of my affections. Now the sight of all that had once been my joy inflicted the most poignant sorrow. My good grandfather’s arm-chair was empty—*his* room was closed. I felt that with him had departed all I had to love in this scene of my happy child-

hood, and my first impulse was to repair to his tomb and weep.

I found the turf green and flowery. I felt that there was for this last asylum a life of regretful remembrance. Every hour of my grandfather's life had been a blessing to those about him; and in the village his name was never mentioned without devotion, and not always without tears.

My aunt Blanche, after having allowed me to indulge unrestrained the first burst of my grief, treated me with that delicate kindness which, inexpressible in words, is read in the eyes, and felt in the manner and tone of voice: my uncle Maurice was attentive in the extreme; and their children as charming as ever. Valentine placed his tiny hands before my eyes to stop my tears, and said, with his sweet voice,—“Do laugh, dear aunt; pray do laugh for me.” And the stouter, Arthur, held out his rosy cheeks, which he patiently submitted to my lengthened kisses.

I had returned to Corcy by way of Longpont; where I was received as a long-lost child by the excellent Madame de Montes-

quious, who expressed the warmest anxiety for my health, happiness, and future prospects. It was arranged that after the six weeks that I was to spend with Madame de Montbreton, I should make her house my home; and the prospect of dwelling with so prudent and experienced an adviser was a source of much comfort.

Never had Corcy been so brilliant and so animated. They led there the most delightful country life imaginable. The whole of the Montaigu family passed part of the summer there. Madame de M * * *, arrived from Rome, whither she had fled to make a kind of Leucadian leap, more fortunate than Sappho, had there found oblivion, and returned to enchant us with her lively wit and brilliant spirits. Madame de B * * * was still the same kind, merry, corpulent creature. Finally, M. A. de M * * *, the artist, was, as ever, blunt and good-humoured—two qualities not over pleasing in him to Madame de Montbreton, who regarded as a great deficiency his want of those impassioned feelings, or that mute admiration usually the tribute of young men to the hospitality of a gracious lady hostess. A great

deal of M. de Montaignu's talent lay in his brushes and in his voice. It would perhaps have been imprudent to talk seriously with him; but it was most agreeable to hear him sing the sentiments and impressions of others. We often played in concert. To his rich voice he added a brilliant facility of execution, which could only have been attained by severe study. He would repeat from memory the most difficult *fioritures* of Lablache and Tamburini, never required pressing to sing, and was never tired.

The family were nearly always united at Corcy. After breakfast we stayed in the drawing-room; and while Madame de Montbreton reclined on her long chair, we conversed with her by turns. Then we read or worked; and, after an hour's toilette, met at dinner: the evenings were spent in general conversation, or in music, and occasionally a dance. All the families in the neighbourhood met at Corcy on Sunday.

I continued to suffer from my internal complaint, which kept my complexion as pale as ever, and I almost lived on milk and strawberries. Occasionally I took a walk, and more frequently long rides on horseback. On my noble

and fiery Eiram, left for my use by M. Elmore, I often rode over to Villers-Hellon ; or, accompanied by M. de Montbreton, made excursions to view all the distant seats, extensive prospects, and romantic spots about the country. Sometimes we went shopping to the little village of Villers-Coterets.

M. de Montbreton's amiability increased every day. He paid me the most assiduous attentions—very singular in the great merit of their not being addressed to the young and insignificant girl, but to the young wife, refined, accomplished, and elevated in anticipation, by an aristocratic alliance, to the honour of commanding universal homage and adoration. Nothing could be more absurd than this little anticipated amour. I laughed at it—rather amused to permit addresses to my future, tolerable by their perspective, but of which I should never have suffered the foolish levity, had they been addressed to my present. I spoke of it to Madame de Montbreton ; who, highly delighted, asked me, laughing, to rid her, by a little forbearance, of the jealousy of her husband, who she averred became insupportably dull when he had only herself to love.

Madame de Montbreton was a firm believer in Mesmerism ; she preached the mysteries of magnetism, implicitly avouched its miraculous cures, and manifested in short all the enthusiasm of a proselyte. M. de Montesquiou was the antagonist with whom she found it most difficult to cope ; indeed her attacks upon his rational and well-founded incredulity having all failed, she determined to convince him triumphantly by proving on me the extent of her somniferous power.

Upon my return one day from a distant ride, overpowered by the sultry weather and a violent pain in my stomach, she accordingly had me undressed, and made me lie down on a soft sofa. Placing my knees betwixt hers, she next told me to close my eyes, and commenced a series of slow and continuous passes, which at first seemed to thicken the air I breathed ; and, in the course of half an hour, plunged me into a deep sleep, which lasted some time. I heard loud cries of joyful surprise on awaking. Unconsciously I had become a rare and precious subject, the hope and honour of magnetic influence. It was proposed to renew the experiment ; then to interrogate me respecting

my sensations. I was of opinion that my sleep had been induced by fatigue; but to this a thousand conclusive arguments were opposed; and, too ill to contest the point, I suffered my languor to prevail, and believed what I was wished to believe.

New experiments were tried the following day. Sleep again confirmed the first triumph; without, however, convincing the incredulous, who presumed to think it natural that I should go to sleep at midnight, after a day of fatiguing exercise. They had, moreover, my silence to oppose to Madame de Montbreton's triumphs; for unfortunately I did not speak, and—a mute Pythonissa—I was without an oracle, under the inspiration of the god who deprived me of sight.

One morning I was awakened by Madame de Montbreton's entering my room with the sun's first rays, and seating herself on my bed. "Well," said she, "you have spoken at last. You have been talking of me, of your health, of the diamonds——" I shuddered when she came to this word; but the explanation that followed brought a smile upon my lips, and calm to my mind. I had, it seems, answered

her questions respecting her sister's jewel-case, and the circumstances attending the robbery of the diamonds; which, I had said, had been stolen by a foreigner, sold to a Jew, and were no longer in France, &c. It was impossible for me to believe that I had said all this; and not at all desirous of becoming a false prophet, and being erected into a sibyl in the face of the world, I begged her to keep my revelations a secret. But to this she would by no means consent. In ecstasies at her success, she wrote a joyful account of the brilliant result of her experiments on me to her mother—a professed enemy of Mesmerism—and triumphantly proclaimed her success to her neighbours and visitors.

For nearly a month I thus continued to play the part of a talking-doll, giving utterance in my sleep to nonsense of which upon awaking I was compelled to take the responsibility. My science one day astonished even myself. Madame de Montbreton, having on her finger a little pimple, which she could not succeed in removing, applied for advice to her adept; and I prescribed an ointment compounded of alum and mercury. Regardless of the entreaties of

her husband, who decried its imprudence, and of mine to have the sage nostrum submitted to the doctor, she persisted in trying the somnambulist remedy—but to this day I am ignorant with what result.

All this, which in my ill health had at first, in giving me peace, afforded amusement to others, soon became matter of serious anxiety. There was a mystery in it, which I could not fathom; my words, which I knew to be oftener false than true, were of a nature to oppose in me the blind faith that sets at naught reason and reflection; and my respect for the dear magnetiser's character would not suffer me to regard the whole affair as a plot. I talked the matter over with Lalo, who was philosophically sceptical; but she was unable to obtain leave to see me when magnetised, although I sanctioned her wish.

My incredulity was not unnoticed by Madame de Montbreton; but to conquer it all her attempts were vain; her arguments fell cold on my ear, and with all the influence she usually possessed over me, on this subject she failed to bring conviction to my mind.

A singular circumstance almost shook my

disbelief. The Board of Woods and Forests having a law-suit with M. Charpentier, I gathered, from a word or two dropped by a keeper and accidentally overheard by me, that he was unfairly dealt by; and, without pausing to reflect, I wrote to M. Charpentier to denounce the conspiracy directed against him, and to inform him how to defeat it. Feeling that the step I had taken would only be blamed if known, I carefully concealed it. What, therefore, was my astonishment when Madame de Montbreton informed me that I had told her all, in a fit of somnambule confidence,—that I had repeated to her my letter word for word! Shocked and alarmed, I was unable to join in the laugh raised at my involuntary indiscretion, and I refused my consent to further experiments.

I have, however, since learnt that my secret was not miraculously divulged by me in my sleep, but that it was simply discovered in my *escrutoire*, where I had deposited it, as I thought in safety.

One evening, when we were reading aloud a new vaudeville of Scribe's, the conversation becoming theatrical, nothing would do but we must get up a play. A piece was chosen and

cast in a trice, and the parts copied out and distributed. Vaudeville-music, dresses, and properties, were immediately put into requisition; and all became bustle and excitement. Madame de Montbreton, who had played in noble company at private theatricals, undertook the most difficult parts, and became our prima donna; I was entrusted with the boarding-school misses and innocently-witty wards, with a green apron, and a rose over my ear; M. de Montesquieu was to play the noble fathers, Auguste de Montaigu to discharge the light-comedy characters, and Fernand was our walking gentleman.

Several days were devoted to the conning of our parts. Those who were quick at study made short work of it, while the dull sate apart holding their foreheads. Madame de Montbreton swung in her hammock; while I, generally not far from her, was perched on the top step of a gymnastic ladder, intent on my part, and my head in the clouds. In the evenings, which were devoted to rehearsal, we laughingly criticised one another's droll declamation and awkward attempts at stage gesticulation; and

nothing could be more original and diverting than these family amateur theatricals.

We were on the eve of our first performance; the stage was prepared, our dresses finished, the neighbours bidden to applaud,—when I received a letter from my aunt Garat, recalling me immediately to Paris, where my uncle De Martens awaited my arrival with a suitor for my hand! The news and the order to depart filled me with consternation.

“Good heavens, Marie! whatever has happened?” cried Madame de Montbreton, who stood by while I read my letter.

“A husband has been found for me, madam—that’s all,” I replied; and proceeded to inform her of my sudden recall to Paris by my aunt.

A consultation followed, and on the very stage where we finished our rehearsal, we wrote word to my aunt that in order not to disappoint my friends of long-anticipated pleasure, my expected arrival would be deferred one day; and that I would set out the next night, immediately after the play was over.

Wearied by my part and my conflicting emo-

tions, stunned by the applause, I hastened from the stage into the carriage, crowned with laurels and laden with the floral spoils of my triumph; and reached Paris still intoxicated with my success and the perfume of my bouquets.

CHAPTER VI.

My aunt received me rather coolly. She had left the country and her friends for the appointed interview; and my day's delay had compelled the young man, who was away from his business, to defer a further appointment until the end of the week. Some information respecting him was accorded me; and I heard that he was rich, handsome, twenty-six years old, and the son of a *maitre de poste*, living a short distance from Paris. I was far from sharing the general enthusiasm. Resigned to a marriage of convenience, of course I could not object to the article of fortune; but while handsome features were not indifferent to me, my pride revolted from an alliance with a *maitre de poste*. I had always regarded the business as conducted by enriched vulgar

contractors, versed in arithmetic, but ignorant of good breeding; vain, purse-proud, and silly.

I ventured to make a remark or two to that effect; and they were received with displeasure. I was given to understand, that without beauty or fortune I could aspire to no better match; and my aunt, in her anxiety to see me happily married and settled, forgot that she not only wounded my vanity, but also my heart, in making me suspect the maternal tenderness of her own.

The next day, M. de Martens rejoined us with mysterious looks; he had reflected on my objections, admitted their justice, and, upon reconsideration, offered me, instead of the post-ing-master, an iron-master. Unable to refrain from joining my aunt Garat in laughter, I asked him where he had discovered his mine of husbands. He appeared not to relish our jocoseness, replying, coldly, that he had made their acquaintance at a rich merchant's of his connexion. I had only known one iron-master, M. Muel; I knew him to be rich and educated, and that he passed alternately six months in Paris, and six in the Vosges. As I had been told that mining speculations conferred great

local influence, my first impression was not unfavourable; and as the mania for discussing my prospects, and marrying me, was spreading amongst my relatives and friends, and submit I must to the common lot, I resolved this time seriously to examine and reflect, with the firm intention of not shrinking from the ordeal, if all the requisite conditions should unite.

M. de Martens was not in possession of positive information; he feared that the distance from Paris would frighten me, and my aunt Garat also shrank from the thoughts of this separation, which she regarded as little short of exile. The matter, however, did not trouble me: I had been at Strasbourg, and knew that civilisation extended even a hundred leagues from Paris. Fortune annihilated distance; and as for country life, my head was still so filled with the pleasures of Corcy, that I did not fear it; and without anticipating that my future life would be so brilliant and diversified, I yet hoped that it would be peaceful, unrestrained, and hospitable.

More precise information followed. M. Lafarge was twenty-eight years of age, of honourable family, of acknowledged good character,

great intelligence, and desirous of carrying out his speculations to the utmost extent. He was owner of one of the finest estates in Limousin, with extensive smelting-works and furnaces; he possessed two hundred thousand francs in land and vested capital, secured from the risk of his speculations, and received a large income from his iron-works. I was also told that he had been six months in Paris on business and pleasure; that his wish was to return home with an educated wife to enliven him by her wit and talents; that he had no relatives in Paris; but that his friends, M. Gauthier, the deputy from Uzerche, and General Petit, a peer of France, would vouch for his position and character.

My aunt almost forgot the hundred leagues that were to separate us, as she listened to the statement of M. Lafarge's circumstances, and I likewise was mightily pleased. As his person was not described, I had misgivings on that head; but on recalling to mind all the husbands of my acquaintance, I could remember so few handsome among the number, that I concluded a fatality prevented the alliance in the same husband of good looks *and* fortune.

It became necessary so to arrange a first interview, that a possible objection on either part might be free and unembarrassing; so it was settled to take place in public, at Musard's concert, in the Rue Vivienne. M. de Martens was to join us there accidentally, and introduce M. Lafarge as a friend; a conversation would ensue; and the impressions left by the meeting were to be made mutually known the next day.

My aunt was so delighted with my smiling prospects—she predicted so much happiness, such rich wedding-presents, and so charming a *trousseau*,—that I tranquilly allowed myself to indulge these golden dreams of the future; and, obedient this time to the dictates of common sense and the world's realities, fancied myself under the sway of reason, because not carried away by my feelings.

I saw M. Lafarge for the first time on a Wednesday. The weather was most lovely, the sky cloudless; and no presentiment of the dark future disturbed my mind.

Ye plaintive breezes, that sometimes murmur in unison with the sighing of the wretched in this world, why awakened your voices no echo

in my heart? Oh, ye clouds! coursers of the tempest, why sent ye no warning thunderbolt to rouse me from my sleep! no lightnings to disclose the abyss yawning at my feet! And ye lovely stars! that shone upon me from your azure thrones, could ye send no pale and prophetic messenger of futurity, in falling, to pre-sage to the unhappy Marie her impending perdition!

My aunt had dressed me in the colours that became me best. Strauss's exhilarating waltzes, played by the orchestra, lit up my eyes with recollections of balls and pleasure. And thus seen to advantage by M. Lafarge on his presentation, I felt in an instant that his impression was favourable.

Not equally favourable was mine; for M. Lafarge was extremely ugly. His form and features were the most business-looking conceivable. He spoke to me a good deal, but the noisy harmony of the orchestra drowned his words; and I retired for the night with my head filled with German dances, and forgetful of the important interview.

The first thing the following morning the natural consequence followed. I was sum-

moned by my aunt, whom I found engaged perusing in exultation a heap of letters of all forms and sizes. She told me that I had made a conquest of M. Lafarge, that he was desperately in love, that he had written to ask me in marriage, and to transmit the most minute information respecting his fortune, position, and character. The letters seemed dictated by real affection; while the honourable signatures of the writers would not permit a suspicion of exaggeration. Letters written in order to satisfy the solicitude of a family, and to govern a decision involving a young girl's future prospects of happiness and well-being—letters promising her the protection of a man of honour and his friends' affection,—letters of such fearfully sacred importance should be deliberate and irrefutable, filled with truth and the most certain information: such letters it is not permitted to question.

One was from M. de Chauffailles, who, himself a large manufacturer, and the near relation of M. Lafarge, ought to have been the best and most trustworthy authority for his cousin's fortune and the prosperity of his trade.

Another, from M. de Chauveron, a solicitor,

calling himself the business-agent and intimate friend of the family, contained a grandiloquent account of their fortune, of the iron-works, of the mansion at Glandier, and spoke in moving terms of the strong affection subsisting between M. Lafarge and all his relatives.

Other proprietors attested to the territorial value of the property. M. Boutin, the curé of Uzerche, guaranteed the morality of my lover; and in the heat of his knowledge of the human heart, sent for my edification a graceful picture in detail of the home where I was invited to forget my girlish dreams, and establish my new empire in abundance and joy.

All this was perfectly satisfactory,—yet my aunt asked more. She begged M. Doublat, a friend of hers, to apply directly to M. Gauthier; and the answer was an eulogium on M. Lafarge's moral character, and further satisfactory guarantees of his commercial position. Not stopping at vague general information, M. Gauthier professed to regard his intimate friend M. Lafarge in the light of a son; pronounced his fortune, from his own personal knowledge, to be one of the largest and stablest in Limousin: his mind he characterised as one of those

vast intellectual capacities that live only for progression ; and after warmly praising his generous heart and strict probity, “ Most happy, sir,” he added, closing his dazzling enumeration, “ will be the young lady who shall confide the happiness of her life to his keeping. Had I a daughter, I should be proud and happy to accept him for a son-in-law.”

After the perusal of these letters and the flattering encomia they conveyed, I could no longer object to M. Lafarge on the score of ugliness, nor weigh this against the great and noble qualities ascribed to him. I wished to commence the serious business of life reasonably—to make a good match ; and here was a rare opportunity, with, in addition, moral guarantees still more rare. I saw myself beloved by an excellent husband ; an orphan, I found a second mother, whom, kind and affectionate as she was described, would claim my tenderest affection. Recluse from the fashionable world the greater part of the year, I should live for the friends who were to people my solitude, and blessed and beloved by the poor people who enriched us.

Although my aunt was pleased with my

ideas, she yet resolved not to suffer me to hold long interviews with dame Reason, to whom I was almost a stranger, and who, like all despots, exacts passive obedience. She kept me near her, spoke to me of my future mansion, of her intended visits, and of mine in return to Paris.

Madame Dulauloy, with whom also I spoke of my offer, was of opinion that it would be insanity not to accept it. In short, all conspired to persuade me to consent.

On the following Friday my aunt returned, if not a positive acceptance, at least a very favourable answer to M. Lafarge; and when I entered the drawing-room, they were going over a thousand little confidential details, which my presence did not interrupt.

“You must call upon my notary, sir, in order that you also may obtain the necessary information as to my niece’s fortune,” said my aunt.

“What information can I require, my dearest madam? I know Mademoiselle Marie; and the matter of fortune has become of no importance.”

Deeply affected by this disinterestedness, I gratefully extended my hand to M. Lafarge;

and he spoke to me of his mother, who would love me as a daughter: then he reverted to his future projects. He told me that Glandier was rather solitary, but that he saw a good deal of company; adding, that every spring, his business calling him to Paris, he should bring me to revisit my family.

The next day M. Lafarge brought in a statement of the product of his manufactory. The actual net income was thirty-five thousand francs a year; which, when the completion of a road in progress of formation should supersede the expensive transit of the iron on the backs of mules, and my portion should have enabled him to extend his works, could not, he proved, amount to less than fifty thousand.

On Sunday M. Lafarge dined at the bank. He and my aunt wore looks of deep import when I entered the drawing-room; and they shewed me the coloured plan of an extensive manufactory and works, headed by a view of a charming mansion, whose blue-slatted roof harmonised admirably with the sky; while smooth gravelled terraces led to a garden symmetrically laid out, with box borders, and aristocratic fountains in full play. On a level with and

exactly opposite the house was an orchard, on whose verdant turf reposed the Gothic remains of a Chartreux church ; two long rows of poplars supplied the avenue ; and a rivulet, that contributed the mite of its current to the water-power that moved the works, bounded the garden by its gracefully-winding and bubbling stream. The sight of this pretty spot eliciting from me a cry of joy, “ ’Tis your future home,” said my aunt, kissing me, and giving M. Lafarge my hand : “ it is your own, indeed ; for, without consulting you, we have hastened the tedious preliminaries of the marriage, and the banns have been published this morning.

A slight tremor shook me at this ; I was uncertain whether to smile or weep, when, to calm me, my aunt adduced a thousand excellent reasons. M. Lafarge, she said, had been six months absent from his works, where his presence had become indispensable. I ought to know, she continued, that nothing could be more disagreeable than the series of wearisome interviews, in which it was impossible to study each other’s temper, but very easy to grow mutually tired. And, after adding that M. Lafarge, being proud of me, wished to shew

me at Pompadour races, which, attended by all the rank, wealth, and fashion of several departments, were to take place on the 19th of August,—“Be merciful,” she concluded, laughing: “he burns with love and impatience; I also am gasping for breath in this scorching Paris, to which I am only returned to see you married: so restore us to life and to the country as speedily as possible.”

The wedding-presents were next to be considered. M. Lafarge wishing to give me whatever money could buy, and my aunt exacting that he should commit no extravagant follies, there ensued a contest between disinterestedness and generous prodigality, and wise foresight; while I, embarrassed by my awkward situation, seated myself at the piano. M. Lafarge shortly after rejoined me in ecstasies; he adored music, and was enchanted at finding I possessed that accomplishment. It was settled that he should present me with an excellent piano, which we were the next day to select at Pleyel’s. Accordingly we went; and I had several instruments out of the sonorous apartments of the renowned maker sent to the bank for a day or two’s trial.

When I had made choice of a very fine square piano, this new friend was at once despatched, that I might find it ready upon my arrival at Glandier.

The days succeeding the memorable and decisive Sunday evening were spent in a round of bustling preparations, which left me no time to reflect on the past, or calmly anticipate the future. The mornings were engrossed by Madame Colliar's workwomen, trying and fitting my bride's clothes, discussing some articles of dress, and proposing others. My trousseau was, in truth, a charming one, and most complete; and having been chosen by Madame Dulauloy, exemplified her excellent taste and elegant simplicity. This research in the imperceptible articles of the toilette has always seemed to me a luxury almost of duty.

At noon my aunt claimed me until dinner-time. She had taken upon herself the exclusive charge of the selection of my *corbeille*, ransacking every shop, and persecuting legions of despairing milliners, to obtain the newest materials for dresses, unheard-of caps, and all-surpassing bonnets. Upon our return, when

M. Lafarge had not accompanied us on our trifling rounds, he stayed two hours. Sometimes we went to the play, at others my aunt was away visiting ; and of these latter occasions I availed myself to write to my friends and make up my accounts. I rarely had a moment to devote to my piano.

Madame de Montbreton wrote to me every day, in order, she said, to make me sensible of all the happiness in store for me, and to prevent my old romantic notions from obtaining an ascendancy in my mind. Madame de Leautaud was in Artois, at her sister-in-law's : in announcing to her my marriage, I asked her what I should do with the diamonds, it being impossible to sell them previously to my marriage, while my departure immediately after its solemnisation would leave me no time to attend to them after. I also expressed my sorrow at being unable to serve her, and my ardent wish to return her jewels, and rid myself of the responsibility attending their possession. Marie promptly replied, that for her to keep her diamonds was more impracticable than ever ; that M. de Leautaud's researches and suspicions went on increasing : she implored me, there-

fore, to carry them with me into the country, and keep them until the return of Mademoiselle Delvaux should offer us a means of making use of them ;—“ we may then,” she added, “ correspond without danger through her intervention ; but until then we must use the utmost precaution.” Then, to prevent the possibility of consequences, she recommended me to burn her letter directly I had read it, as the one in which I had spoken of my marriage and of the diamonds had already been destroyed by her. Further on, Madame de Leautaud requested me to make use of the pearls she had formerly destined for my wedding-present, but to speak vaguely to her sister of her gift, without explaining of what it consisted. Finally, she demanded a full account of the wedding, my trousseau, my jewels, my present happiness, and my dreams of the future.

Antonine was astounded by the intelligence of my marriage ; on reflection she was at first gratified, and finally displeased at having been taken so late into my confidence. I had some difficulty to make her understand that in advising her of my changed prospects the day of publication of the banns, I had communicated

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a fact as soon as it had been made known to me, since three days before I had not even seen M. Lafarge.

The news was joyfully received at Villers-Hellon. My aunt and uncle Collard foresaw that the match would place me in a satisfactory position; and my old nurses and cottagers forgot the hundred-and-twenty leagues in thinking of the thirty-five thousand francs a year. They had one regret, which I shared with all my heart, namely, that my future blessing was not to be pronounced in the midst of them, in their church, and by their good curate.

Madame de Martens was at Enghien for her health. M. Lafarge paid her a day's visit; and my aunt shared the confidence of her husband, who incessantly vaunted of having insured my happiness. My resolution was fully approved by Madame de Montesquiou; who, coming to Paris to be present at her son's college-examination, expressed the tenderest wishes for my welfare, and lavished on me her motherly advice. Madame de Valence also, returning from the waters a few days before the signature of the contract, devoted them to

the exercise of the same gentle and pious solicitude to which she had always accustomed me. Most deeply was I touched by these maternal attentions of my beloved grandmother's friend.

CHAPTER VII.

AMONGST the purchases that engaged me most agreeably were the souvenirs that I determined to leave with the guides, companions, and friends of my youth. I requested, among my bridal gifts, a purse of fifty louis, on purpose to expend in these presents. How carefully I recalled to mind wishes expressed in my hearing, and how great my pleasure to be enabled to realise them! Living more in them than in myself, I wished to redouble my own joy in that of the objects of my affection. Antonine was ill, in an early stage of pregnancy; I surprised her by the gift of a set of baby-linen; and these diminutive habiliments were so pretty, so graceful, that one could almost behold in fancy, smiling from under their laces and embroideries, the dear little stranger whom we expected, and whom we caressed already in our

dreams. My aunt Garat had, in selecting for me, strongly admired a magnificent English veil; on the nuptial morning she found it attached to her bonnet. I had the gold head of a walking-stick carved in the style of the middle ages for my uncle Garat. My aunt de Martens received a bracelet that she had admired; Hermine, the long-coveted box of colours, for which she was in future to sigh no more. To Madame de Montbreton I sent a Cabochon emerald ring, set in gold in the form of lion's clasped paws. To Madame de Leautaud, to gratify at once her known preference of the fashionable jewel-animals, and my own aversion for serpents, frogs, and other reptiles, imitated with repulsive fidelity, I sent a set of ornamental studs in the form of ladybirds,—a pretty insect, with purple spots on an orange ground, superstitiously regarded by the peasantry as a little prophet of good luck. I believe that my heart succeeded in its thousand affectionate arrangements. My nurses were not forgotten; and I did my best to leave happy hearts in my beloved Villers-Hellon, which in future I could only revisit in memory.

While occupied with the care of making these

purchases and arrangements, I seldom saw M. Lafarge; and our rare meetings were always spent in making him admire his own handsome presents, and in thanking him for fresh touching proofs of affection. Knowing that I loved the bath, he one morning brought me the plan of a bathing-room, to adjoin my apartment at Glandier, which was to be all ready for me on my arrival. Fearing that a journey by mail would affect my health, he made me a present of a charming britzka, in which to travel down post: and every morning he sent me bouquets of flowers. To my family he was all attention and respect; and even found kind words to address to my nurse Lalo, who, with tears in her eyes, pronounced him "as good and generous as he was ugly." Sometimes, also, we conversed of our future life; and I asked him for an account of the house, the servants, his own tastes, and those of his mother. He informed me that my drawing-room, an extensive and well-lighted apartment, was furnished with red velvet, hung with a few pictures, and richly carpeted; that the dining-room opened on the terrace, and that the offices were also on the ground-floor; that his favourite mare

was black, and his horses all less remarkable for beauty than strength and vigour. He kept three or four men-servants; and it was arranged that I should select a good personal attendant to go down with us. My choice was soon made; for it had been settled years before, that upon my marriage, I should engage a young niece of Lalo's, clever and ready, as devoted and faithful as her aunt, strongly attached to me, and who had only entered service to qualify herself at some future time to enter mine.

While these confidential interviews with M. Lafarge were passing, my aunt received visitors in her other apartments, read, or wrote; and the only third person present was my pretty cousin Gabrielle, who listened to me with the greatest attention, and watched us with the vigilance of a duenna. If occasionally her rôle wearied her, on the other hand she was proud of it, and in running to her mother's lap, to hide a yawn, would say, "Don't be alarmed, mamma, I am at my post. But it's O so dull! It is not at all like M. de Sabatié and my elder sister, who used to kiss on the sly in spite of me." Gabrielle had notwithstanding a profound respect for her future cousin, who was pleased

with her prattle, and gave her sweetmeats. She generally sat upon his knees, and said aloud that "he was very fashionable."

One day, when I was out shopping with my aunt De Martens, while we were at a jeweller's selecting a setting for a set of turquoises, she made me buy a broad dead-gold ring, as a present for my future husband. I had engraven inside it simply a date—that of our first meeting, with our names. On our return, we told my aunt Garat of our purchase and its destination: she seemed uneasy. "My dear girl," said she, "you must not be romantic. I have to tell you a piece of news of no great importance, and which you must not suffer to disturb you. M. Lafarge is a widower."

This was a thunderbolt. From my earliest years I had had a horror of second marriages; I had persuaded myself, and had often said, that I could never bring myself to marry a widower; and now, in three days my marriage-settlement was to be signed—in three short days I was to succeed a buried bride mouldering in her shroud! My first impulse was to break off my engagement; my second, to burst into tears under the caresses and ex-

hortations of my aunts. They could allow for surprise and vexation; but regarded as madness the rooted despair that would have prompted me to rescind my given promise. I knew not what to say in my excuse; my sorrow was not of the kind that can be expressed in language, and it weighed on my heart like a presentiment.

They had long been seated at table, when I was compelled to make my appearance in the dining-room with my red and swollen eyes. My antipathy had been disclosed to M. Lafarge; for I observed a few moments after, on looking up, that he was pale, silent, and overwhelmed. My aunt De Martens placed me by her side; and taking my hand in hers,—“Courage, my love,” she whispered; “forgive our involuntary concealment, and be nobly forgetful: you see how your emotion agitates him.” I softly called Gabrielle, and pulling from my finger the ring I had bought, I desired her to present it to her cousin from me. From that moment, I rarely regained my wonted tranquillity; yet I never attempted to put off the marriage: my word was sacred.

On Saturday, August the tenth, the notaries and the male members of the family met to settle the articles of the deed. Understanding nothing of the jargon of the law, I did not think myself bound to listen ; and seated apart in the embrasure of a window, I conversed on literature with M. de Chanbine, my old notary, who was as idle as myself ; his original mind having prompted him, some little time previously, to shake off the trammels of wills and marriage-settlements.

A moment's silence gave me notice that the bargain was concluded on both sides ; and when the pen was placed in my hand to sign the deed in which two learned notaries had exhausted their ingenuity, the one to sell as dearly, and the other to buy as cheaply as possible, a poor creature made in God's image, I smiled with contempt, and a blush of shame mounted to my forehead.

Antonine still suffered from her pregnancy, and was lying in a long chair ; I seated myself at her feet, and we were conversing of the joys of maternity which made its pains so sweet, when the news arrived, that, as it was

impossible for us to be married at the mairie on Monday, we must repair thither immediately.

Without time to reflect, I was arrayed in the most charming dress in my trousseau, placed in a carriage, and conducted to a little dark room, where a registrar, confined in an iron cage like those in the Jardin des Plantes, grinned us a gracious welcome. He opened his large registers, in which the witnesses inscribed their names—not forgetting their titles. Then we were led through dark passages into a room hung with dirty drapery, surmounted by the Gallic cock, and there received by a big man with his throat enveloped in a tricoloured scarf, and holding in his hand an open code.

So far I had observed the drama performing around me; I had mechanically watched in a glass the waving of the feathers that shaded my bonnet; while occasional compliments, to which I was indifferent, were addressed to me: but when it became necessary to say “Yes”—when, shaking off my lethargy, I felt that I was giving away my life,—that the object of the contemptible legal farce was to imprison my thoughts and to fetter my affections and

will,—tears, that to check would have choked me, found their way, and I sunk almost insensible into my sister's arms.

Borne into the air, new impressions rapidly succeeding each other recalled me from this painful crisis. My aunt Garat, wishing to distract my attention, determined that I should be left alone to enjoy my new state of independence; and saluting me as a wife, and free, placed me in a pretty little 'calash, and without permitting my sister or M. Lafarge to accompany me, told me to employ the rest of the day as I pleased.

I drove first to the Flower-market; thence to St. Roch, where I offered up a short prayer; and finally to Madame de Valence, who had company, and was astonished to see me enter alone duly wrapped up in my cashmere. We stepped aside, and I imparted to her that I had been married an hour before; that my first moment of freedom I bestowed upon her; and that I had obtained a promise for my marriage to be kept secret two days, in order to remain still single to the persons who would come in the evening to sign my contract,—above all, to be still a maiden to him

whom the law had already made my lord and master. I thanked Madame de Valence a thousand times for the magnificent scarf she had sent me in the morning ; and we had a long conversation. Delighted with my secret wedding, and my flight to her, she made me participate in her gaiety ; and related with lively humour a dozen little incidents that had attended her own marriage.

I returned to the bank in the evening by the Champs Elysées. The weather was superb : crowds of elegantly-dressed promenaders thronged the avenues, and I determined to mix with them, for the first time in my life, alone and free, without being compelled to guide my steps by another's, and with no other protector than myself. Alighting with an elastic step, I was for a few moments pleased with my independence ; but when I felt myself elbowed and jostled by the crowd, and surrounded by strange faces, I became afraid, and re-entered my calash, convinced that in this world woman needs a supporter, and can only live alone in deserts.

M. Lafarge presented to me, on my return, a magnificent bouquet of orange-flowers and magnolia. He continued all the evening affec-

tionately attentive, and kindly forgetful of his rights, scarcely pressing my hand openly. There came many visitors: inquiring glances and all good wishes were directed to me; and for the last time I was a gay, careless, and happy girl. I would not wear any of the ornaments proper to my dignity: a muslin dress, and a few natural forget-me-nots in my hair, composed my toilette; and I danced till morning with a light heart and buoyant spirits, smiling upon my friends and him for whom I was about to leave them. I was so fatigued, that on retiring to my room I could scarcely undress; and slipping into bed in haste, I slept sweetly and profoundly till morning.

All day on Sunday I was sad and painfully occupied preparing for my departure. Antonine and my cousins assisted me to pack with care the nick-nacks of my corbeille and trousseau; but when our looks met, words of absence and regret rose to our lips, and scalding tears that we would have repressed forced their way, and the most trifling expressions were often broken by sobs.

My nurse Lalo, who wished to see to every thing, in order that I might miss her as little

as possible, took snuff twenty times as she gave her instructions and advice to Clementine ; and complained of a cold in her head, to account for her red eyes. Ursula in expressing her good wishes left me to imagine her grief.

My dear little room already wore an air of confusion and desertion ; it was encumbered with bandboxes, trunks, and packages ; a thick coat of dust had settled on the furniture and chimney-piece, like a mourning-veil, and my flowers lay withered in their overturned vases. I did not wish my maiden sanctuary to be seen in such a plight ; so when M. Lafarge knocked at my door, I entreated him in pity not to enter in the midst of the confusion of packing. Disregarding my words, "The time for ceremony is past," said he, laughing, and opening the door ; "and I enter in virtue of my marital prerogative." Seizing me rudely round the waist, he would have kissed me, but I repelled him impatiently, and made my escape into the drawing-room—where, finding myself alone, I burst into tears. My feelings were too painful to be described ; and even now my heart bleeds at their remembrance.

Antonine presently came to seek me, bring-

ing M. Lafarge, unhappy and repentant, to beg my pardon. I feebly spoke it; but my words did not come from my heart. There are in life wounds trifling in themselves, but tremendous in the consequences they foreshadow, and in the prophetic impression of which they are the tocsin, awakening in the soul echoes of misfortune which time alone has power to still.

In the evening it was settled that we should dine at Véry's, and go afterwards to the Cirque Olympique, in the Champs Elysées. On the agile amazons, whom I had so often admired, the well-trained steeds and dexterous horsemen, I gazed on this occasion unmoved; but I was roused from my sorrowful abstraction by a scene passing near us. It was a Sunday evening, and the theatre was crowded; we with difficulty obtained good seats, and the gentlemen of our party were obliged to stand at some little distance. Immediately before us was a sullen-looking and brutal old soldier; and next him a venerable silver-haired old man, protected apparently by a younger one, whose noble features, elegant figure, and profoundly sorrowful look, attracted my attention and

sympathy. Attempting to take out his snuff-box, the *militaire* accidentally knocked off his venerable neighbour's hat.

"Pray be careful, sir," said the latter, meekly, no apology having been tendered.

"I have paid for ease and elbow-room—so stand clear," growled the old soldier.

"You are an insolent ruffian," cried the young man.

"And you a beardless coxcomb," was the rejoinder.

All eyes were fixed on the interlocutors, and silence was called for: the son led his father away, and both left the house. A short time afterwards, the young man returned; and coldly approaching the individual who had insulted him:

"You are a coward," whispered he, pinching his arm, "if you refuse to give me satisfaction."

"You shall have it willingly; but I give you fair warning that I never missed my man."

"Hold your tongue . . . to-morrow morning at eight . . . this card will inform you my name and address."

I turned pale at these words, which I dis-

tinctly overheard; the young man noticed it, thanked me by a look, and bowing, left the theatre.

I was too strongly affected to divert my thoughts from what had passed. "To-morrow," I reflected, "while I shall be surrounded by troops of happy friends, a father will be mourning the loss of his son; perhaps some maiden, betrothed like me, will be lamenting broken-hearted the death of her lover." . . . Suddenly, as he pulled out his handkerchief, the brutal aggressor accidentally dropped the fatal card he had received from his adversary. I hastily stooped and picked it up unperceived; but as I must have restored it if he had observed my movement, I put it into my mouth, and felt happy when I had reduced it to a state of pulp. The thought of the misery I had doubtless averted restored a calmer tone to my mind; and the rest of the evening I enjoyed the consciousness of having performed a good action.

Exhausted by this day of emotions, I slept soundly till my old nurse entered my room with her cup of coffee. It had been the affectionate creature's habit from my childhood to

make me taste the first spoonful of her breakfast, on pretence that it never seemed good until tasted by me. We felt on this occasion that we were performing this ceremony for the last time; that we must bid adieu to all our habits of childish but entire affection; and not seeking to conceal our tears, we let them flow unrestrained, gazing at each other in speechless grief.

My aunt Garat presently entered my room. Thinking only of my toilette, and with just pride, she set to work upon the wreath of quivering orange-flowers that was to deck my hair, without noticing my agitation: fearful only of having my rich laces torn or crumpled, she was unapprehensive of any weakness on my part at the moment of departure. She had, in her idea, insured my future independence and comfort by this fortunate marriage, and was scarcely able to contain her joy. Antonine and my aunt De Martens arrived,—the one weeping, the other armed with gentle and consolatory advice: both contributed to soothe me.

My toilette completed, I knelt before my aunt De Martens; and having entwined the orange-flowers in my hair, and attached my

white bridal-veil, she pronounced over me a solemn blessing, in my parents' names, and in those of all my absent and departed relatives. M. Lafarge entered; he appeared affected at witnessing my emotion, and kneeling before me, kissed my hands over and over again. Reconciled by these tokens of solicitude, I conjured him to be always confiding and indulgent; never to cease, above all, to love me,—remembering that I was an orphan and in need of all his tenderness, and that I should have no one but him to look to for affection. Kissing my forehead, he promised all; and then led me to the drawing-room, where we were awaited by my assembled friends. My tears soon ceased to flow, beneath the affected, indifferent, and scrutinising looks that accompanied the storm of compliments and congratulations by which I was assailed. We were married at the church of the Petits Pères, after a very short service and a very dry homily. Unwilling to expose to the world the thoughts that agitated my heart, I hid my prayers and tears beneath my veil; and upon my return was pronounced a graceful and well-behaved bride.

After a long and animated breakfast, my aunts took me to the drawing-room, and closing the doors, began to initiate me into the fearful mysteries of my new duties. They said things that made me so blush and tremble, that to stop their disclosures I was tempted to tell them a fib, in declaring that I knew all they could tell me perfectly well. However, as I had only speculated on the nature of these important mysteries, I retained my illusive theory, which was innocently stupid, and my terrors, which were overpowering; fortifying my resolution to travel night and day without stopping until I reached Glandier.

My aunt's exhortation over, my bridesmaids entered to disrobe me; and, having removed the white wreath from my head-dress, I distributed its white flowers among my unwedded cousins, male and female, who were come to bless my marriage by their presence, prayers, and good wishes. One bud of my virgin wreath I secretly reserved for myself; and, depositing it in a little heart-shaped locket, a present from my mother, which I constantly wore, I kept it for a souvenir and a talisman. This unspoken impulse of my heart was blessed.

Every other flower of my happy childhood and youth has withered, or been ruthlessly torn up and scattered: this one alone has escaped ravage, and remains still fresh and unfaded under the sanctified ægis of my adored patron-saint.

CHAPTER VIII.

M. LAFARGE having some business to settle, and I arrangements to make, post-horses were ordered for four o'clock. The last minutes were sorrowful and fleeting; and when the postilion's whip and the chimes of the *Petits Pères* gave the signal for departure, I almost fainted under my friends' last adieu. Meanwhile M. Lafarge came out; and the prolonged tortures of parting made us all ill. After two hours of this martyrdom of suspense, my shaken nerves so overcame me, that I was borne to Madame de Martens' bed, and the departure deferred till the following day.

My aunt Garat, to soften the sadness of separation, went to the Opera to hear Dupré; my aunt De Martens and Antonine attempted to calm me; and my brother-in-law, who was informed confidentially that I was dying with

fear, undertook to persuade M. Lafarge on this occasion to play the quiet part of sick-nurse.

All passed as we wished ; my husband kissed me paternally on the forehead, and I enjoyed at last a few hours of repose.

At early dawn the next morning the horses' bells gave the signal of departure : it became necessary to tear myself from the home of my friends. After an abundance of tears and embraces, the last hand-shaking over, I passed through Paris so profoundly lost in my sorrow, that I did not bestow on it a last look. Soon, however, my tears were dried by the fresh morning breeze, which blew aside my veil, and shook the dust from the roadside elms. The birds carolled their matins ; the pale east became purple, and the sun presently rising in golden majesty, all nature seemed to leap with joy at receiving the first kiss of her god.

I looked at first mechanically on the rich and cultivated landscape that was passing before my eyes ; then listened unreflectingly to the song with which the postilion accompanied the cracking of his whip ; and amused myself by watching the gallant looks he turned to

Clementine, and his questions respecting her mistress, "who seemed over-afflicted for a bride." His words reminded me that I was married, and that my sorrow was unbecoming. Turning to M. Lafarge, I saw he was asleep, and I abandoned myself to reflection. Hitherto my life had been isolated in the midst of intimate but subordinate affections; now it was to become the hope and joy of another life. I was in future to be well beloved: the feeling of uselessness that had weighed so heavily on my past, was to give place to a sentiment of duty; and my every word and action were to honour and please an excellent man who had bestowed on me his name. M. Lafarge seemed to adore me: I had not yet learned to love him, but was told that I soon should; and love in an interested match being only a tender esteem, I already felt in my heart all that such a sentiment could inspire. While reason thus whispered, imagination pictured to me the delicate and impassioned words that were to soothe me all this first day;—the first kiss on my forehead, the second, and then the third, which I might perhaps return; then the arm tenderly supporting my feeble frame, and a

whispered "I love you;" to be succeeded, when the first star appeared, "Dearest, do you love me?"

A jolt awakened M. Lafarge; stretching his arms with a prolonged and sonorous yawn, he kissed me on both cheeks, and said, "Come, my dear, let us breakfast."

The carriage contained a cold fowl; seizing this by the two wings, M. Lafarge divided it, and offered me half: slightly disgusted, I declined the food. Thinking I was ill, he became anxious and very attentive; he poured out a glass of Bourdeaux to restore me, and upon my declining that also, drank the whole bottle himself, "for himself and for me, who now made but one."

The smell of the provisions overpowered me, and I took Clementine's seat on the box. I amused myself by paying the postilions, making them talk by promising drink; and I tried above all to make light of the disagreeable realities the breakfast had awakened—soothing myself with the reflection that the meal was very rarely made in that primitive manner.

Towards noon I re-entered the carriage; and sought to converse on literary topics, the-

atricals, my beloved Villers-Hellon, and its fine forest. My words on this subject seemed to interest M. Lafarge; but my ignorance of the science of felling, and the price of timber and charcoal, soon silenced him; and pulling out his pocket-book, he became absorbed in calculations, and appeared not over pleased with his employment.

I tried to sleep; but the burning sun and piles of resplendent clouds accumulating in the east, and extending over us their dazzling mantle, induced a headache which rendered sleep impossible. Towards five, we reached Orleans. I could scarcely support myself, and asked for a bath, in hopes of obtaining a little refreshment and repose.

I had scarcely entered the room, when the door was violently shaken.

“Madame is bathing,” said Clementine.

“I know it. Open the door.”

“Sir, the bathing-room is open, and it is impossible for Madame to receive you.”

“Madame is my wife; and to the devil with all ceremony.”

“Pray do not speak so loud,” I exclaimed,

somewhat petulantly. "Wait ten minutes, and I shall be dressed."

"It is precisely because you are undressed that I want to come in now. Do you take me for a fool, or think that I am to be driven off for ever by your d——d Parisian modesty?"

Clementine trembled violently, but continued to say firmly, "Surely Monsieur will be polite the first day!"

"Marie, I command you instantly to open the door, or I will break it open."

"Break it open, sir, if you please; but it will not be opened by me. Strength is powerless over my will: know that once for all."

After terrifying me by a storm of obscene imprecations that I should shudder to write, my husband departed in furious mood. I sunk insensible on the floor of the bath; my affectionate Clementine in alarm kissed my hand a thousand times to console me, and when I became calmer, left me in tears to seek M. Lafarge. In vain she attempted to persuade him of his error; but on her telling him that I was ill, and that a repetition of scenes of the kind would kill me, "So be it," he said; "I say no

more for the present, but I will bring her to reason when we arrive at Glandier."

I met M. Lafarge without a word. He asked me at first whether my "airs" were over; and seeing that I was unwell, he embraced me, and became kind and attentive as before. I was unable to eat at dinner; and having taken a cup of tea, I spent an hour in a balcony, feeling the horrors of the abyss yawning at my feet, but dreading the thoughts of coolly measuring its depth.

The motion of the carriage, the beauty of the sky sprinkled with countless stars, the stillness and balmy breath of the summer-night, made me almost insensible to the bitterness of my reflections. I attributed to passion M. Lafarge's violence. His love was very different from that of which I had dreamed: I was terrified at the thought of it, but hopeful of conquering it by its own violence, and, in time, of tempering a passion to which I had given birth; and when I heard him snoring in the vehicle, I was consoled and almost without anger.

We arrived in the morning at Châteauroux, where M. Pontier, the special receiver of La

Châtre, awaited us. He was an uncle, and the first of my new family whom I had seen. I wished to please him, and to appear amiable and affectionate. I therefore chased the clouds which yet saddened my memory, by the power of my will and by excitement.

M. Pontier was about fifty years old; he had a frank and open countenance, his words were warm and hearty. He seemed delighted to see me, made his nephew a thousand compliments respecting me, and called me his child in so kind a voice, that I felt myself perfectly ready to love him. His wife was to accompany us to Glandier. She was no longer young, and was commencing that epoch of life when, without losing the pretension to youth, we assume the follies of another age: her spirit was caustic, overbearing, and subtle; yet whilst she remembered the honey of the lip, she unfortunately forgot to govern her eyes.

No one suffered from *ennui* near her, but it was at the expense of the heart the intellect was excited; and after a short walk arm-in-arm with M. Pontier, I understood he abandoned his wife to us with very little regret.

They gave us an excellent breakfast; and

then it was necessary to think of departure. I had first, however, a few moments of unexpected amusement. Having entered, I know not why, my new aunt's chamber, I found her reading the journal, whilst her husband was putting her hair in a swarm of papers.

"Follow my example," she said to me seriously; "there is no greater convenience than making of one's husband a lady's maid: M. Pontier dresses hair divinely, laces me astonishingly well, and no one knows better than he does how to give grace to a bow, to make one's waist expressive, or arrange the folds of a shawl."

At that instant the model-husband wished to place upon her neck a collerette, which was a little rumpled. Madame Pontier, observing the false pleats in it, said bitterly to M. Pontier, that "since the morning he might have found plenty of time to have touched it with the irons, and that, moreover, it was not the first time she had perceived his indifference. That the death of her father had left her in the depths of misery; for nothing remained that she could love, and that loved her, except a dog." This favourite dog was a little greyhound, which she

installed along with us in the carriage. The animal took me treacherously into her friendship, and as I understood her to be my cousin in the heart of Madame Pontier, I generously sacrificed myself to the relationship, and became the little brute's couch.

Madame Pontier talked to me a great deal about literature; of the bad taste of Victor Hugo, in not worshipping Racine; of the madness of Alexandre Dumas; of the sublime grandeur of the poets of the empire; but more especially of Madame Sand's immorality, who wrote like *a cook*, and thought like *a fish-woman*. My dear aunt assured me that no decent saloon in La Châtre would receive *that woman*; that respectable females were ignorant even of her name; and that she herself had quarrelled with a sub-prefect (I believe), who wished to corrupt M. Pontier by lending him an infamous work called *Lélia*. I had the hardihood to own having read *Indiana*, and dared to express my admiration for the magic and power of the beautiful prose, splendid and elegant as a diamond hidden among rose-leaves.

She lifted her eyes to heaven, and astonished

at so much perversity in one so young, relieved her mind at the expense of her family, whom she charitably made me acquainted with, by branding all her principal relatives with some mortal sin; and heaping peccadilloes without number on cousins, nephews, second cousins, third cousins, &c. &c. &c.

M. Lafarge being on the box, my aunt endeavoured to gain my confidence. After having rapped at the door of my vanity with a thousand exaggerated compliments, she told me I must have a great deal of courage to quit Paris; that I should soon be the slave of *ennui*; and that it was a moral murder to bury me at Glandier in company with a husband as coarse as his iron, and a mother-in-law who possessed neither ideas nor education.

I was annoyed by the part of victim which she would have had me sustain. I assured her I had a taste for solitude; that I esteemed my husband deeply; and that it would be a part of my pride to become agreeable and necessary to him. I told her also, that I hoped, nay, was even certain, of returning to the bosom of my friends, to whom both the

promise and the business of M. Lafarge would yearly restore me.

We traversed a cultivated and varied country. I expressed to Madame Pontier my admiration for the beauties of the southern part of France, which to me would be novel, and spoke to her gaily of the mountains, valleys, and ruins over which I was about to establish my empire.

When night brought M. Lafarge into the carriage, his aunt jested with him on the wandering commencement of his honeymoon.

He wished to answer like a conqueror; but having the bad taste to plead the cause of his love with coarse and noisy kisses, I had my skin rubbed off by that public mark of possession, and repulsed him at first gently, and afterwards with impatience.

Madame Pontier laughed at my prudery, so removed from the primitive manners of those I was about to mix with; and told me that one of the pleasantest customs of Limousin was to invade the nuptial-chamber on the marriage night, in order to carry to the newly married pair a cup of spiced wine, of which they must partake in bed. The wit of the men

most esteemed in society displays itself here by the deeper or brighter crimson their jests can bring to the brow of the youthful spouse, by the amount of stifled laughter they can call from the lips of other women, anxious to see the modesty of the bride profaned, whom they envied perhaps in the morning.

“ Oh, you will not escape, my lovely niece ; and I constitute myself the champion of that merry tradition of olden time,” said Madame Pontier, in conclusion.

“ I conjure you not to do this, Madame ; I cannot support so bitter a jest ; and never will I pardon a husband who suffers me to be soiled by that humiliating and sinful mirth.”

I concealed my face in my hands, and pretended a desire for sleep, to relieve myself from my sad impressions. I felt myself tremble at the recital of such brutal customs. The Orleans scene passed before my affrighted imagination—I more than feared, I was disgusted. I looked towards the heavens, whose lovely stars appeared to protect me ; and counted the hours which yet separated me from a new night, which was, alas, starless to me.

CHAPTER IX.

WE were surprised at Masséré by a fearful storm. To the thunder which rolled deafening over our heads succeeded a thick and continuous rain. Grey clouds coursed along the heavens, and seemed to rest their vapoury masses heavily upon the earth. Shut up in our carriage, we only saw the white thread of the route winding sadly before us, the poor panting horses and the jacketed postilion, who urged the jaded animals to face the rage of the tempest with a hoarse and savage cry.

At eight in the morning they pointed me out some black buildings at Uzerche, which formed the faubourg of Ste. Eulalie. Then we traversed a road against the side of which were dashed the waves of the Vézère; and we descended at a wretched inn, for the sake of avoiding a meeting with a part of the family with which I was in duty bound to be em-

broiled, and who dwelt in the only passable house in the town. Madame Pontier left me for the purpose of making a few visits; and M. Lafarge informed me that the carriage being broken, we must remain here some hours. M. Buffière, my brother-in-law, who waited for us, gave me two loud kisses of welcome. A little cousin of sixteen also came to inscribe his relationship upon my cheeks. At last they left me alone, every one being more inclined to make a wonder of my carriage, than to give me a gracious reception. I was ill and fatigued—I wished to lie down: a fetid exhalation drove me from the alcove in which I had sought repose. I then placed a chair in the middle of the chamber, to remove myself as much as possible from the foul walls and furniture surrounding me, while Clementine went to order me a cup of tea.

After waiting an hour, I was attended to. They possessed no tea-pot; a huge water-jug, closed by a paper cover, had ingeniously replaced it; while a few leaves of Swiss herb-tea floating in the ocean that filled the jug-ular tea-pot, usurped the name and functions of the Chinese shrub, itself unknown to the in-

habitants of Limousin. I opened my window ; the rain had ceased, but the fog still enveloped nature and heaven. Suddenly the bells began, lively, joyous, and animated. Every house opened to allow the good souls to pass, faithful to their call. It was the August feast of our ady, my holy patroness. I covered myself in my mantilla, and wished to go forth, that I might carry my grief to the foot of her altar.

“That is impossible,” said M. Lafarge, whom I had sent for to inform of my intention ; “you will be the butt of every look, the object of indecent jests and raillery.”

“What matters that ? I am above such ridiculous considerations.”

“I tell you, you must not go ; I do not wish you to be seen by my family ; they are jealous of my marriage. Curiosity must bring them to you ; and they must only see you dressed in your best.”

“You flatter my poor person. Well, since you *insist*, I will not go to mass.

“Do not pout, puss. It is because I love you, that I wish you to dazzle them with your jewels, your shawls, &c. &c.”

I remained alone ; Clementine came sadly

near me, saying, with a broken voice, as she took my hand, "I wish you a pleasant *fête*."

I did not possess sufficient strength to reply to the good girl; and, resting my head on my hands, burst into tears. How much bitterness was there in the lovely and joyous memories that *fête* of the virgin awoke within me! In other days, I had opened my eyes under the kisses and presents of all my family. I wore a pure white dress, the livery of the Virgin; and with the flowers given me by my grandfather, I went to our little church trusting and happy. On coming out from mass, the peasants brought me good wishes and flowers; all the women embraced me; and I embraced all the little children. Then the men went to prolong their good wishes over some bottles of good wine; and the young girls, forgetting the harvest labour, ran under the shadowy lindens that they might dance in my honour. The evening re-united a few friends. I was the queen of the day: the flowers seemed to blow for me alone. My name, inscribed on the cakes, was repeated joyously in the saloon and in the servants' offices; and I lay down at night, fatigued with dancing, with kindness, and with pleasure.

Alas ! to-day life opened anew. I was alone, isolated, without prayers, kindness, or friends. " My God," I cried, " have pity on me !"

It was nearly eleven when the carriage was in a condition to start from Uzerche. I was in haste to leave the town, and chase my dark thoughts away with the sight of my pretty little castle ; to find, in short, a family which would forget envy in kindness and in love. We stopped one hour at Vigéois with a cousin of M. Lafarge. I was so desirous to arrive at *my own home*, that I allowed him to embrace me, and took some fruit mechanically, without being yet aroused from my mournful impressions. They brought some saddled horses to the door. I was weary and bruised, and wished to finish the journey in the carriage, although they cried out at the imprudence, and that it was impossible to cross in a chaise the savage country which separated us from Glandier.

Not a ray of sun had smiled from behind the clouds since the morning storm. The trees still drooped with wet ; and the ploughed-up roads, which reduced to a walk the pace of the horses, threatened us with continual and almost inevitable danger. After three hours of this

dolorous travelling, we descended into a hollow. They shewed me some smoky roofs, which emerged from the fog, and informed me that they belonged to the buildings of the forge; and at the end of a little avenue of poplars the carriage stopped.

I leapt from the carriage into the arms of two women. I walked up a long, dark, damp, and cold path. I mounted a little dirty stone staircase, clammy with the drops of rain that escaped from a broken roof. I then entered a large chamber, called the drawing-room, and fell in a chair, gazing wildly round me. My mother-in-law had taken one of my hands, and examined me with a censorious gaze. Madame Buffière, a little red, fresh-looking woman, in perpetual motion, loaded me with caresses and questions, and wished to draw me from the bitter stupefaction which she mistook for timidity. M. Lafarge came to seek us: he tried to seat me on his knees; and as I repulsed him with a positive refusal, he said aloud, laughing, that I only knew how to *recline in a tête-à-tête*. “Mamma,” he added, “you do not know how she loves me, that little *canne*. Come, my duck, own that you are devilishly fond of me.”

At the same time, to suit the action to the word, he clasped my waist, pinched my nose, and embraced me.

My pride revolted at these words and actions, and I felt myself bursting with indignation as I listened to the endearing names, which classified me so politely with so many animals. No longer able to support this torture, I pretended excessive fatigue, letters to write, and retired to my chamber, where I locked myself in with Clementine.

My chamber, as large as the drawing-room, was wholly unfurnished : two beds, four chairs, and one table, hermit-like, occupied its vast solitude. I asked for an inkstand; they brought me a broken sweetmeat-jar, in which a morsel of cotton was swimming in grey water, an old pen, and paper blue as the sky. Clementine wished to undress me—it was impossible for me to rest in my bed. I made her lie down near me—for it appeared to me that, even sleeping, that good creature would be my safeguard,—and I attempted to write : I could not command an idea—I was crushed by a terrible deceit ! I recoiled at the idea of so soon causing so much sorrow to my friends—my tender-

ness refused to tell them half my anguish—my pride so soon to play the part of victim. A hundred leagues separated us. Long days must pass ere I could bring them to my side. What would become of me during these long days? What should I do? My God! what should I do?

The grey colour of the heavens, darkening as night approached, added to the indignation which filled me at the deceit I suffered from—the greater and more repugnant fear of the nocturnal tête-à-tête, which I dreaded so much, and could no longer shun. I have never known hatred; but when my heart is wounded, I am powerless to master my indignation. At that moment I should have sickened if M. Lafarge had kissed my hand—in his arms I should have perished.

Suddenly my part was taken—I resolved to leave him—to fly to the end of the world; but especially not to pass the night within these dismal walls. That firm resolve rendered me a little calmer; but a means of executing it must yet be found. My imagination came to my aid: I resolved to obtain from M. Lafarge himself an order to depart—to wound his pride,

his jealousy, and his honour ; to render a reconciliation impossible—to tell him that I did not love him ; to tell him that I loved another, and that, violating my recent oaths, I had seen his rival at Orleans and at Uzerche. In short, to tell him that all my married thoughts had been adulterous ! Never could I have dared use that frightful word—never could I have repeated aloud so many humiliating lies ; but the paper blushed not, and I trusted it, in all the bitterness of my heart, with the care of my deliverance.

Having written several pages, I wished to re-peruse my letter : its energy appalled me, but I saw that I was saved. After reading it, they might kill me, but it was impossible to retain me, or to pardon. They came to call me. I placed the letter in the folds of my girdle. I was calm, because my will was strong ; and I had the invincible courage of the warrior who has set fire to his vessels that he may hope alone for victory or death.

All the inhabitants of Glandier were present in the dining-room—the dinner was long : the evening even longer. The affectionate manner of Madame Lafarge, and the attentive care of

Madame Buffière, added to my sufferings. I tried to be amiable. I would have shewn myself sensible of their kindness, during the last moments of our companionship. I was troubled and ashamed to return upon them so soon all the ill they had made me suffer during the three last days. Every time that I felt myself grow pale or weak — every time that the monotonous tone of the clock told me the dreaded hour drew nearer, I pressed the letter to my breast, and as I listened to the crackling of the paper, I seemed to hear it murmur, “I watch : fear nothing.” Ten struck. M. Lafarge interrupted a business-conversation which had occupied all his attention for some hours, a conversation in *patois*, carried on more especially with his brother-in-law, but in which others of the family occasionally joined. I did not attempt to comprehend their strange idiom, but I could not avoid a profound feeling of sadness in listening to a tongue which was not that of the country.

“Come, let us to rest, my wife,” said M. Lafarge, drawing me by the waist along with him.

“Give me, I conjure you, a few minutes to myself in my chamber,” I answered.

“Another whim !” he replied ; “but I yield to it, and for the last time.”

“I entered my chamber, summoned Clementine, and giving her the letter, begged her immediately to give it to M. Lafarge. At her return I drew the bolt, and cast myself sobbing in her arms.

The good girl, dreadfully frightened, addressed a thousand questions to me ; and I had scarcely strength to explain to her my despair, the letter I had written, and my resolution to leave the same evening.

Clementine was terrified by this confidence, and supplicated me to endure all for a few days ; to send for my family, and not expose myself to be killed by my husband in a moment of wrath.

They struck loudly on the door : I refused to open it ; and, kneeling by my bed, I wept. A more energetic summons restored my self-possession. I told Clementine to leave me alone—to open the door ; and retired into the embrasure of a window which was open. M.

Lafarge entered in a fearful state. He addressed to me the most outrageous reproaches; told me that I should not leave him; that he needed a wife; that he was not rich enough to purchase a mistress; that, lawfully his, I should be his in fact. He wished to approach and seize me. I told him coldly that if he touched me I would leap from the window; that I recognised in him the power to kill, but not to pollute me.

On seeing my paleness and energetic despair, he recoiled, and called his mother and sister, who were in the neighbouring chamber. They surrounded me, weeping; prayed me to pity their poor Charles, for the sake of their honour and their happiness, which I was about to destroy. M. Lafarge also cast himself at my knees; and my courage, firm enough to contend with injuries, softened into tears at the voice of their sorrow and their prayers.

I answered, that I could easily pardon the odious lie of which I had been the victim—that without regret I abandoned all my fortune—that I knew how to keep the name I had taken pure and honourable,—but that I should never possess the courage to remain among them;

that I wished to fly, and, if they detained me, I should know how to die.

My sister-in-law took me in her arms, and loaded me with caresses and questions. I related to her a few words from the scene at Orleans, and of all which had chilled me: I allowed her to imagine how much I dreaded the first evening of my arrival, and what terrors I had felt. She drew her brother into a corner of the chamber, and spoke warmly with him. Madame Lafarge came in turn to attempt to calm me: she promised to love me, assured me that she was proud of me, and that she would use the most maternal and affectionate attention to her daughter Marie. She entreated me to pardon her son, who, loving me to distraction, had deceived me to avoid the despair of losing me: lastly, to console me, she tried other means; she assured me that the country, which appeared so sadly gloomy under the wet torrents of the storm, was rich, gay, and animated, on a fine day. She told me also that I should be the absolute mistress, and alter my new dwelling at will, according to my tastes and my habits.

M. Lafarge returned near us now with his

sister. He was already more calm; he took my hand and kissed it, weeping. I abandoned it to him, and after some minutes' silence, begged him to forget the injury I had done him—to take my fortune, but still, beyond all, to allow me to leave him. He explained to me that I could not dispose of my dowry without the consent of my family; implored me to wait for two or three days; and promised me not to attempt detaining me, if he failed to obtain his pardon, to prove to me his love, and to make me happy. I could not resist so many prayers and tears, and consented to remain some days with him as a *sister*. M. Lafarge assured me my wishes should be commands to him; that my kindness made him but too happy: while Mdme. Buffière said, laughingly,

“Be tranquil, my little sister: if he is not modest, we will protect you. Would you like that I should sleep in your room?”

I thanked Madame Buffière, and made them put Clementine's bed in my chamber. This violent and stormy scene had so grievously disturbed me that I felt exceedingly unwell. I remained more than an hour without consciousness, and suffered until morning the most pain-

ful nervous spasms. My new family would not quit me : they feared I had taken poison ; but at length, on day breaking, seeing I was suffering from fatigue alone, they left me to myself, and I slept heavily until the dazzling rays of an August sun opened my eyes to life—late enough in the morning.

When I arose, they told me M. Lafarge was too ill to quit his chamber. I sent Clementine to inquire after him ; then I dressed myself, and was led down to breakfast. The company of the preceding evening was increased by the addition of a friend of the family—an old white-haired advocate, whose manners were gallant and attentive ; his language was slow, refined, and pure. Sad and pre-occupied, I answered coldly enough to his politeness, until, after a short walk—during which his conversation was kind, various, and displayed an evident desire of pleasing me,—I forgot myself a little, and became animated enough to answer him.

I found in M. de Chauveron mind and good sense, veiled, however, under forms so sufficiently stamped with the majesty of the bar as to become rather absurd. Did he speak of music, it was with an imposing solemnity ; if

he perpetrated a compliment, it was done with an austere gravity worthy a funeral oration. To sum up all, he wished you good morning eloquently, and asked for a glass of water with the most seductive persuasion. After his departure, I was presented to M. Pontier, a physician of Uzerche, and uncle to M. Lafarge. He was a man of about forty, with a noble and intelligent countenance, whose burning and passionate glance seemed excited and unhappy under the mantle of snowy hair which shaded his brow. Scarcely had he pressed my hand, and ere we had yet exchanged words, I knew that he was a friend, and my heart had adopted him. He made me visit the ruins; talked to me like a poet of their origin, their history, and their legends; drew me a touching picture of the love awaiting me in my new family; and spoke to me much of the happiness which I perhaps might not enjoy, but which I was destined to diffuse around me. I unhesitatingly interrogated M. Pontier as to the heart and character of his nephew. He answered me with perfect candour, that M. Lafarge was uncultivated, and rude as his native hills; that all his studies had been directed with views of

utility and to labour ; that he had no talents, but much good sense ; and that it would be most easy to overcome by the heart his positive and material habits. M. Pontier assured me that M. Lafarge already loved me beyond every thing, and that nothing would be impossible to him which might enable him to gain my affection. Some of the sadnesses of my soul had involuntarily risen to my lips. M. Pontier knew how to quell my fears. He pointed out to me my future life, surrounded by its duties, with his energy, his imagination, mournful, yet pleasing, until, in returning to the house, I promised him my friendship, and felt myself strengthened by the support, protection, and tenderness which he had pledged to me, and which I had accepted.

After having felt his patient's pulse, M. Pontier prescribed to him my presence as a calming potion, and conducted me to his room. M. Lafarge shewed himself so grateful for my visit, that I felt recompensed for the effort it had required.

He asked me if I had been from the house, and had yet seen the forge. I told him that I had admired the ruins, and several beautiful

places near them; but that I deferred visiting the foundry until his convalescence should enable him to give all the explanation indispensable to my ignorance.

During the remainder of the day I was calm, and almost forgot the last evening's frightful despair. All around me seemed to possess an oblivious charm. A smile on my lips carried joy to every eye; and without attempting to account for it, I felt myself happy in being the centre in which originated those various expressions of hope and affection. As she undressed me, Clementine told me that M. Lafarge had called her into his chamber, to tell her that he could not exist without me; that he wished to keep me by surrounding me with care and kindness; and that he applied to her to learn my tastes and my habits. After a long conversation, he charged her to tell me that I was mistress there, and might model the house as I chose—nay, even build another if this could not be made sufficiently elegant,—and that the necessary workmen waited for my orders but to obey them. M. Lafarge had learned from Clementine that the most simple and necessary articles of the toilette were wanting in my

apartment ; he despatched an express to Uzerche, to bring them for me: he also told me that he would immediately send to Paris, and request my aunt Garat to secure me a footman, in order that I should not suffer from the language and mal-address of the servants of the country.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN I rose on the morrow, the heavens were so blue, and the August breezes so warmly fragrant, that I felt less sad, and longed to spring out barcheaded under the azure canopy, that I might make acquaintance with the rustic nature surrounding me. M. Lafarge, too, was quite recovered; he led me to a small boat, which he unmoored, and after a thousand windings in the midst of lovely meadows, the little stream led us to the foot of the forge.

The workmen, warned to expect our visit, received us with a large bouquet of wild-flowers, and a welcome as cordial, noisy, and expressive as their idiomatic *patois*;—they appeared well satisfied with their new mistress, and repeated, with many congratulations, that they found me *proud* and *pleasant*—that is to say, amiable and pretty.

I wished to see and understand every thing. M. Lafarge, enchanted, gave me many interesting details respecting the machines, the melting, the casting, and the forging of the iron. His language, embarrassed and incorrect in the drawing-room, became lively, animated, and engaging, in his little sombre kingdom. He now appeared to me well-instructed, and enthusiastic in his pursuit—not confining himself to the narrow boundaries of routine, but understanding the necessities and pleasures of improvement and progress. It was the hour of dinner in the forge; an immense copper, which was boiling on some heated scoria, was borne into the middle of the room, and one of the youngest workmen, who gaily brandished over his head a huge ladle, attribute of his function, poured out a foaming pottage of lard and vegetables into plates filled with slices of black bread.

I begged M. Lafarge to add a few bottles of wine and some fruit to that coarse and frugal repast, and was curious enough to taste some of this Spartan broth, which I found excellent, greatly to the delight of these honest men, who laughed loudly at the compliments I paid their

cook. I then got them to fill my glass at the spring which murmured near, and drinking to their health as they drank to mine, I promised them, if I was destined to remain among their mountains, to care for and love them well. The enthusiasm of these good iron-founders knew no bounds ; they emptied their bottles with hurras, placed a coronet of leaves round my bonnet, and escorted me in triumph as far as the house.

In the court I found the peasants, who had fixed a may-tree there, covered with garlands of flowers and streamers of the national colours. They joined the workmen in congratulating me, and fired a volley from their fowling-pieces, which woke every echo in the ruins ; after which they danced a *bourrée* around their tree. I was much amused with the grotesque and heavy movements of that Limousine dance, as well as with the singular figure of the musician, resting against a tree, and blowing with all his might in a primitive bagpipe ; and I forgot for a while what I had suffered, in the contact of this lively and dancing gaiety which surrounded me.

I entered the drawing-room as night came on ; and the sight of this sad and vast apartment, which would have chilled the least susceptible

woman, as I cast my eyes round it, restored all my terrors. There was a living vulgarity in it, which threatened to infect your whole person and all your thoughts. The walls were covered with a paper whose sickly colour was meant not to rejoice the eye, but to conceal more easily the damages and injuries of time. An alcove, ornamented with drapery of red calico bordered with yellow cotton-fringe, faced two windows similarly furnished; then there was a chest of drawers of walnut-tree wood, on the top of which was a piece of carpeting, proud enough of the new dignity that had lifted it from the earth, and representing the touching history of two doves swooning in ecstacy, and bound together by a love-knot azure as heaven. The chimney-piece was ornamented with five monstrous oranges; two beautiful candles, whose unpolluted wicks attested their virgin freedom from use; and a night-lamp, whereon Adam and Eve embraced fraternally—sinless, but, alas! leafless too. To these we must add the loves of a fair Greek and fierce Albanian—a specimen of the fine arts much admired by the connoisseurs of the neighbourhood; and two couches in red Utrecht velvet, with some straw-bot-

tomed chairs which ran round the walls. There were also two doors of wood, and two others glazed.

M. Lafarge read my feelings in my face, and immediately spoke of improvements, plans, and projects. At first I remained inattentive and silent; then, thinking that to listen would bind me to nothing, and wishing to balance the pleasant day he had given me by a little good behaviour, I allowed him to go on creating around me. I advised him to turn the saloon itself into a bedchamber, with closets for the bath and the toilette; to turn the horrid entry-hall into a vaulted gallery, lighted by agreeable and elegant ogive windows, and to pave it with white flag-stones. The desert without doors and windows, which they called a kitchen, had sufficiently beautiful proportions to metamorphose admirably into a Gothic saloon, to be ornamented with sculptured cornices, massive portals, and sombre hangings. To the right, several little rooms would unite themselves into one nice dining-room; to the left, one could have a study, in which might be found, to while away the solitary hours, pens, books, and a piano. My mother-in-law lis-

tened with an air of stupefaction to these revolutionary plans, and seemed to apprehend that I might be a little mad. Madame Buffière, who wished to approve them, asked if the young Parisian dames were all so learned in house-architecture. As for Madame Pontier, she caressed her dog with a bitter smile, and appeared to me to grow every moment more odious.

The Pompadour races were to take place on the morrow ; they proposed my going thither, but I was too fatigued ; and I did not wish to appear in the world supported on the arm I had not yet accepted as that of my protector : I consequently expressed my wish to remain at Glandier. They appeared to approve of my decision. My sister-in-law went to Pompadour with one of her cousins. I insisted that M. Lafarge should accompany them, and remained at home in freedom, at least in all appearance. My piano arrived from Uzerche during those hours of liberty. I had it unpacked, remounted, and placed in the drawing-room ; and I experienced a lively satisfaction on finding its sonorous and brilliant notes resound as harmoniously after the

jolting of a hundred leagues, as they had done at the moment of its departure. My cases had also arrived, and Mesdames Lafarge and Pontier, who kept me in sight, were thunder-struck at all they contained.

Many persons came to honour our hospitality after the races. Clementine, ever eager to see me elegant and admired, made me wear a dress of white muslin, fastened my hair with long pins of gold, and placed in it a sprig of purple fox-glove. When M. Lafarge saw me thus, he was enchanted with my toilette, quite proud to present me to his friends, and quite delighted to see his morning bouquet in my hair; while I, touched by his joy and gratitude, permitted him to kiss the forehead which he had adorned. After this I every day received the mountain-flowers, and every evening used them in my toilette for dinner.

This first *soirée* was sufficiently animated: I endeavoured to make myself agreeable, and to be attentive to *his* guests. I played quadrilles—I played even the *bourrées* which I had heard the evening before; the company insisted on dancing them, and to me they now appeared far less pretty, executed with

arms arranged by pretension, and gestures inanimate, because restrained. They proposed a *déjeuner champêtre* for the next day. Madame Buffière undertook its arrangements, on the bank of the river, a short distance from Glandier. The weather was fine, but rather stormy, and the guests very gay, of that noisy gaiety which makes wit by dint of foolery, and which stuns and painfully saddens those who are unable to share in it. There were not enough plates, in consequence of which hands were adroitly called into operation. Glasses were scarce, but this was an enjoyment discreetly managed—they made such pretty commentaries on thoughts discovered by the margin of the indiscreet crystal which your own lips and those of a neighbour had touched.

An amiable youth concealed a *snail* in his lady's *beignet*, and great cries and applause followed the jest. Another, in a fit of distraction, consumed the whole stock of wine provided for dessert: this joke was decried as a bad one, and lengthened several faces, even feminine ones. A third placed a tart upon his head; and a fourth began singing a drinking song, whose chorus required, as an indispensable

accompaniment, the shock of glasses and the shock of kisses, which met with great success amongst some cousins, who laughed under their veils, and blushed apparently at the obligation of embracing a little cousin of their own age. My sombre visage chilled the gaiety of M. Lafarge. He proposed to me that I should accompany him alone to visit a part of his property, whose chimneys were smoking not far beyond a chestnut-tree grove; and, under pretext of seeking a fresher spring, we stole away.

I ran over the rocks and through the bushes,—in order more quickly to escape all eyes, more quickly to lose the sound of all laughter,—so energetically, that when I stopped, certain of having escaped them, I amused myself with M. Lafarge, in mocking at our desperate flight.

Eight days passed in like manner. I received a few visits in the morning, and we took long walks, or made short excursions on the water.

In the evening I set myself at the piano, and had long, serious, and intimate conversations with M. Lafarge. I endeavoured to instil in him some anti-Limousine ideas, which I believed indispensable for every-day life; and

especially a few sentiments, which were more indispensable still in that exchange of esteem and love which must be the base of all happiness in marriage.

A little time after my arrival, I heard M. Buffière boast of having deceived two poor ironmongers, by selling one damaged goods, and by concealing from the other, who trusted to him, the true price of iron.

I was so astonished, so appalled by that vain dishonesty, which dared make a virtue of a baseness, that I spoke to M. Pontier, and told him that it would be impossible for me to remain a mute witness of like frauds; and more especially to do the honours of my table to the poor fools whose spoils would henceforth enrich me.

He approved of my sentiment, blamed what seemed blamable to me, and spoke of it to his nephew. M. Lafarge assured me that he did not support his brother-in-law in such conduct, and that the bad faith of the latter had been one of the causes of their commercial separation. He also promised me to have but one price, and to observe the most scrupulous veracity as to the qualities of his iron.

M. Pontier, who was the confidant of M. Lafarge, had meanwhile made him comprehend that the chamber of a wife should be a sanctuary, in which she alone should reign, and where she should be all-powerful. He told him that the mysteries of modesty were necessary to the existence of love; that delicacy of words, thoughts, and actions, alone could gain my confidence, my esteem, perhaps my affections. Clementine charged herself with reforming the toilette and appearance of M. Lafarge. Knowing all my tastes, perhaps all my follies, she told him the colours I liked—made him wear a cravat which I preferred—and banished some flaring colours which were in very bad taste. M. Lafarge, following her advice, now shaved every day, attended to his hair and his dress, wore great gloves to the forge, and removed from my domestic life two insupportable calamities, which are of themselves enough to destroy all love,—slip-shod shoes and unattended nails. As for myself, in order to be agreeable to M. Lafarge, I tried to love all whom he loved. I took into my liking his sister's little girl, and even attempted to civilise her. She was a beautiful and wild child,

of five years of age, and was the god-daughter of M. Lafarge. To wind up all, I procured a manual written for master-ironfounders, and gave myself up to the study of minerals and metals, the various systems of founding, casting, &c. &c. This soon made me learned enough to talk with an ironfounder without stopping at technicalities, and enabled me to talk with a vain assurance about bars, casting, rough metal, &c. &c.

However, I had not yet written to my family. I did not wish them to suffer from my first impressions; I dared not mention projects to them which I myself had not invincibly resolved on, and which fled on the wings of imagination far away before a fine morning, or a beautiful view, or a single touching word of love. I waited Accustomed from infancy to bury in my own bosom all my griefs, I never knew the selfish want of sympathy, the humiliation of seeking consolation in the pity of a friend. I know how to forget my sorrows to raise the cross which has fallen on *those of my heart*; but in solitude and isolation alone do I find the strength to bear my own cross to the foot of Calvary.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE evening, after having been present at the casting of a font, I felt myself a little weary. M. Lafarge proposed to me to return by water. It was late : the silent earth slept under the whispers of a gentle wind, that passed through the tremulous trees, and lightly rocked the sleeping flowers, as it ravished from those lovely daughters of the sun their glorious perfumes. Occasionally a foolish grasshopper chirped out its joyous song, that woke a whole republic of austere ants. A frog, perhaps dying for love, breathed forth a grievous sigh ; and then, on a sudden, a weak but vibrating note interrupted sighs and songs,—the nightingale commanded silence, that she might serenade the youngest rose whom she adored. In the heavens the stars glittered, and the moon smiled at her own beauty, as her pale and divine image

glowed in the water beneath her. M. Lafarge pulled a few feeble and distant strokes with the oar. . . . He encircled me with one arm, for I was sitting at the side of the boat, abandoning one of my hands to the refreshing wave, and watching the little stream which ran by without a ripple, yet murmured as it flowed with strange mysteries.

A beautiful water-lily floated by. I made an abrupt movement to seize it, and M. Lafarge cried out in affright.

“ Ah,” said I to him laughing, “ you are still pursued by imaginings of suicide ; calm yourself ; reason has returned, and my imagination, at times somewhat erratic, is never sovereign—*woman and despot* but for a few minutes.”

“ You will not leave us, then ?”

“ That depends upon yourself alone.”

“ You know, Marie, that my only wish is to obey and to please you.”

“ Well, promise then to let me continue *very much* your sister and *very little* your wife. You are silent ! Come, accept my proposal, and you shall see how amiable a sister I can make.”

“ But sometimes may I not love you a little also as my wife ?”

“We shall see—on great days, when you have been very amiable, and when you shall have given me a great courage; for I avow I have still fear—yes, a frightful fear.”

“I accept what you will, little original; I love you to madness: do you not love me a little?”

“Not yet, but I feel that that will come, with the aid of God’s grace, and, above all, *of your own*. To begin now, I allow you to kiss me three times; they shall be three binding signatures, to make the contract obligatory.”

The three kisses would probably have been infinitely multiplied, but happily my beautiful water-lily enabled me to discharge a whole artillery of drops of water against him; and then we were at the landing-place, and were, of course, obliged to disembark.

The morrow of the day in which I had accepted my new duties, I ran over my ruinous château with a more indulgent eye. I made plans and projects for its embellishment. Then I wrote to those whom I loved, particularly to my aunt Garat, from whom I begged some articles of absolute necessity. A manservant, wax candles, lamps, and other little

means for naturalising propriety in my little kingdom. I had not the least explanation with those that surrounded me ; but I understood that my mother-in-law had learnt our conversation from her son, when she brought me, with a dignified and sad air, the keys belonging to the ministry of the interior, which she had, she told me, governed for forty years, with order, economy, and prudence. I would not receive the reins of government from hands that were more skilful than mine ; but M. Lafarge required it, and all I could persuade him to accede to was, that a second bunch of keys should be made, that my mother-in-law might have access to all that was useful or agreeable, without recourse to me or my servants. From that moment I resolved that my thoughts should not rest upon the past, but be exclusively occupied on amelioration of the future. I therefore determined to banish weakness and *ennui* at once. Yet at times my heart would suffer from vague sorrows—at times I wept, without reason for the tears whose bitterness corroded my cheeks ; but I was ashamed both of my grief and my tears, and I carefully concealed them, recalling to my mind that I *ought* and

would be happy. During the day I was occupied, active, and frequently gay. I determined to be amiable, and to diffuse happiness around me; but when night came, my fears and my sadness involuntarily returned. I became something more than ill-humoured; and I would play the piano until three or four in the morning.

Truly I am tempted to call the bravery of despair what the world stigmatises as weakness; and I experience as much astonishment as shame, in thinking of the audacious courage required to make a Marion Delorme, or a Mannon Lescart.

We had now wedding-visits to return, and were invited to a little ball. It was decided that we should pass a week at Uzerche.

During the few hours of repose that I took in my passage to Vigeois, they presented to me one of our neighbours, the Count de Tourdonnet. He was an amiable man, of chivalrous mind and character, an ancient officer of the navy, become, in consequence of his legitimist opinions, a very peaceable castellan. His conversation pleased me; and I was happy to

learn that he was married to a young and pretty woman, who might become a pleasing distraction for my solitude, and a friend for my thoughts.

I was received at Uzerche by an uncle of M. Lafarge, Captain Matere, an old soldier, kind and loyal, who received me with affectionate kindness. I found only two faults in his family: a wife cold, *passée*, and withered as one of those old pictures of our grand-mothers, which wear an eternal smile for the benefit of their descendants; and a daughter always laboriously employed in adorning a very indifferent person—who was sufficiently ugly to be good, but unhappily not sufficiently good to be ugly.

Among the other members of his family with whom I made acquaintance, I remarked M. Brugère, whom I was instructed to fear and detest, but whose sarcastic spirit amused without terrifying me; and Mademoiselle Emma Pontier, a young girl with a noble heart—a loving and sweet creature, isolated by her taste and intelligence in the midst of her family—who wanted a friend, and unhappily

had the misfortune to love me, on comprehending all the sympathy which drew me towards her.

The morrow of my arrival, I made thirty visits in the course of a day; that is to say, I walked from door to door to gratify a greedy curiosity, and supply new food for the malicious and calumniating jesters of the city of Uzerche.

I was stupified with all I was obliged to see or hear. The mistresses of the houses received us in their kitchens, with their hair in disorder, their caps covered with ribands and flowers, patched dresses, rumpled collerettes, blue stockings, old shoes, and an incredible amount of luxury in the article of dirty hands.

In these visits, one entered, saluted, sat down, and began to converse. The first theme was regularly, the regret I must experience at leaving Paris; *the ugliness of the country; the ennui which awaited me in a place so isolated as Glandier*. They would then congratulate M. Lafarge on the possession of my fortune, and interrogate me respecting my superb dresses, my *forte-piano*, and my *servante*, who appeared to them extremely elegant, and to whom I must

pay at least *ninety francs* a year; then followed all the slanders and malicious topics of a scandalous conversation.

Astonishment stupified me during the first five visits,—*ennui* made me still more stupid during the remainder. I at first involuntarily occupied myself by endeavouring to find some clean little place on which I could rest my eyes; and after a search, always in vain, I returned to the curl-papers of my hostess, which I began to read, and found them more or less amusing, according to the age of the brats she sent to school. To relieve me from these dull *corvées*, M. Pontier proposed a short excursion to La Grenerie, an estate belonging to M. Deplaces, a rich iron-master.

I found a beautiful château in the midst of magnificent forests. I was received with kindness by Madame Deplaces, an old lady, who joined to the dignity of her age indulgent and cordial feelings; and by her daughter-in-law, a talented and elegant person, who was blessed with two charming children.

This return into the civilised world did me great good; but in returning, the weather was frightful,—the rain, driven by the tempest into

the head of the britschka, streamed on our faces and our clothes. On arriving at Uzerche we were fearfully wet. As there was a family dinner, it was necessary I should put on my best looks; however, about ten o'clock, I suffered so much that I was obliged to beg permission to retire. Madame Pontier followed me to my room, and found me in a fever; she made me swallow large quantities of tisane, prescribed for me profound repose, and to render that more complete, installed Clementine as sick-nurse, and interdicted her nephew's entering my chamber.

I had slept more than an hour, oppressed by fever and fatigue, when I heard some one knocking violently at the door. I asked, with the impatience of a poor sick person suddenly woke from sleep, what was wanted?

"Open!" cried M. Lafarge.

"Has not Madame Pontier told you that, in consequence of my illness, she had directed Clementine to sleep in my chamber?"

"Send her away; I wish to enter."

"My friend, you must not. I beg you to let me sleep. Let us leave a lengthened explanation until to-morrow."

An oath of the most genteel description answered me ; and thinking to be quit of him for this emphatic termination, I buried myself in the depths of my pillow.

“ Madame,” said my lady’s-maid, after a short time, “ I hear a singular noise in the lock—if there should be robbers ?”

“ It is nothing. How timid you are !”

The noise still continued ; but recognising it as an amiable pleasantry on the part of my husband, I did not move. The bolt was solid ; and I hoped that after a few minutes he would get tired of his part of locksmith.

“ Open,” he shortly cried, however, with redoubled anger, “ or I will break in the door !”

“ It is impossible ; I entreat you to leave me to repose.”

“ Open, I say, or I break in !”

“ Break in, if you choose ; but you know well that force will not avail with me.”

“ I am master here, and I will enter. It is not you I want, but my chamber ; give it up to me, and go to the devil, if that suits you.”

A furious kick, followed by the coarsest invectives, made me tremble. Then, strong from my indignation, I leapt out of bed, opened the

door, and, crossing my arms on my bosom, stood before him in mute anger. M. Lafarge, his eyes haggard, his face distorted with passion, wished to drag me violently towards him, addressing me the while with odious epithets; but, exhausted by his rage, he was obliged to throw himself upon a bed, and I was able to retire into the antechamber, overwhelmed with shame and despair, concealing my head in my hands, to stifle my sobs; while my kind Clementine covered with tears and kisses my frozen feet, which she in vain sought to warm.

We were in the cabinet for a few minutes, when, on a sudden, groans, complaints, and cries of agony, were heard in the neighbouring chamber. Alarmed, we would have opened the door of the antechamber, in which we had taken refuge, to seek for help, but it was locked; and when I sent Clementine to M. Lafarge, who continued to groan, she found him in a frightful state, incapable of speaking, and writhing on his bed.

“Call for help, Madame,” she immediately cried; “but for heaven’s sake do not come in; he will make you die with fear.”

I shook the door with all the force in my

arms ; but I hurt them, without being able to burst it open ; and, half mad, I opened the window in despair, tied a sheet to it, and was preparing to let myself down into the court. At that moment Madame Matere, hearing the noise, came to the window to ask what was the matter. I cried to her that her nephew was horribly ill ; that the door was locked ; and that they must come and open it without delay.

In less than an instant the whole house was afoot ; a locksmith was sent for. At last M. Pontier and the family rushed into the chamber. My aunts, frightened by my bewildered air, took me to their room with them, to try and calm my despair ; and soon after M. Pontier came to reassure me, and to tell me that his nephew had only suffered from a violent nervous attack, which he attributed to the coldness of the morning, and an excitement caused by the champagne. My uncle then made me lie down, gave me a calming potion, and surrounded me with delicate cares and consolation.

I sent, every quarter of an hour, to gain information respecting M. Lafarge. He asked to see me immediately ; but M. Pontier refused to allow me to enter his chamber until

the crisis was over: and when I understood what this crisis referred to, it was I who refused to enter; and I explained to my uncle that I should not have the power to endure a repetition of such a scene. I determined to prevent its recurrence by appearing profoundly hurt, and by shewing to M. Lafarge that a few words of repentance and regret could not obtain pardon for an anger as unjust as brutal.

Overpowered by emotion, I slept towards morning; and at my waking, they brought me a tender letter from my aunt Garat, which appeared to arrive providentially, to drive away the memory of my terrors and anguish, and to make me forget my intended severity. I was consequently disposed to indulgence when M. Pontier came to ask my permission to conduct to me his *faulty nephew*, whom he had already subjected to three hours of lecture and repentance.

M. Lafarge cast himself weeping at my knees. I extended him my hand, which he embraced with transport. Forbidding him the least word of explanation, I promised never to make an allusion to that sad night, whose remembrance seemed so justly to humiliate and distress him.

M. Lafarge was as well as possible—I was ill; yet as he feared scandalous and annoying suppositions, if I did not attend a ball which took place that evening, I promised to vanquish my uneasiness. But at the same time I told him that, instead of making any secret of his violence, I should simply state that his poor head, heated by champagne, had undergone a terrible nervous attack, which terrified my inexperience; and that, seeing him so ill, I had believed him quite dead.

“Go,” I added, *smiling seriously*; “you have your pardon—I remember it no more; but take care not to re-awaken this grief, for I could not survive it.”

I was still sad and fatigued when it became necessary to prepare for the ball, and attend to my toilette. Seven was the hour fixed for the fête; but Mademoiselle Matere, raised by her elegance to the position of *lionne*, would not appear until an hour later than all the other ladies; and, thanks to this submission to her *lofty position*, I was able to enjoy, on my entrance, a complete *coup d’œil* of a Limousin rout.

CHAPTER XII.

How singular a thing is a ball in a little provincial town, which has not the honour of being a prefecture, and which does not even possess the sweet consolation of possessing a sub-prefect! The ball to which I had been invited was one given to the beauties of Uzerche by the young collegians, who, having received their crowns in the morning, wished to dance with all their glory in the evening, and, chivalrous vanquishers of participles or translations, to make the sovereigns of their thoughts dance in honour of their triumphs.

The little hundred-sous piece, extracted from a grandmother's tenderness, or that which leapt, in a moment of pride, from a father's purse, are sacrificed in the preparations for the fête. These gallant boys have perhaps collected sixty francs—that is a great deal; and

they can join two branch lustres to six beautiful candles, and the sharp melody of a flute to the shrieking notes of a violin.

An estaminet had lent its large saloon for the ball. Around, on narrow benches, the lady dancers were sitting in the shadow of their mother's turbans. In the middle, a compact mass of black-vested men, in white pantaloons, left but a difficult passage for the young stewards, as they performed their duty of receiving the new-comers, smiling at the women, and snuffing the candles. All the young girls, dressed in white and spotless muslin, cut in a virtuous fashion, like the tunics of the holy Virgin, had very red arms under their Scotch thread gloves, and cheeks fresher than the knots of satin riband that glowed in their hair. They occupied themselves very attentively in keeping a double register of their engagements. The young unmarried girls, distinguished by a formidable streamer at the bottom of their skirt, and a rose over the ear, were excessively confidential to each other, and divided modest glances coquettishly between the partners past and partners to come with commendable impartiality.

The young wives, lost amidst the tulle, the satin ribands, flowers, and jewels of the marriage *trousseau*, talked loud, and laughed more loudly, as they disputed the qualities of their admirers. While this went on, the respectable mothers were estimating dresses and virtues; reckoning the dowers of the dancers; detailing the result of their arithmetical studies to their neighbours; and speculating on the hopes of catching the marriageable partners who seemed smitten by their daughters' charms. Thanks to the merits of novelty, I was honoured with the jealousy of all the women, on account of the admiration of all the men; and I was an absolute torture to the imagination of the elaborate calculators near. They were unable to value or comprehend my simple India muslin trimmed with hops, and found an improper and blamable levity in my head-dress, adorned with the blossoms of these same hops, from which I had borrowed all the simple elegance of my toilette. M. Lafarge presented some of his friends to me; and among others, M. de Meynard, whose lively and caustic spirit, with its Parisian memories and regrets, almost made me look on him as a countryman, and wil-

lingly accept him as my chevalier for the rest of the evening. The *bonhomie* of our young heroes, so happy in their ball, and so proud to shew themselves gallant to the ladies, caused me for a while to forget the scene of the previous evening; while the inconceivable novelties that surrounded me even gave me a few moments of joy, which were matters of astonishment to the rest of the assembly, who could not conceive of dancing in a provincial ball-room with pleasure in the eyes, and a smile on the lips.

In preparing for this ball, Mademoiselle Matere, with the double intention of *looking beautiful*, and vexing me by depriving me of the distinction of being the only female dressed in the *newest fashion*, had copied the shape of one of my marriage-dresses. It was only at the ball I recognised the brother she had improvised to my *corsage*.

Unhappily, I perceived at the same time that a second little *corsage*, quite indispensable to the modesty of this description of dress, had been forgotten; and that the any thing but ivory shoulders of my cousin were too freely shewn above their silken prison. Thinking this rather more than ridiculous, I warned her

with very periphrastic delicacy of her mistake ; but my observations were very drily received, and I saw that she thought me jealous of the indiscretion of her criticised *corsage*.

The scandalised and sneering looks of the other girls, and the stifled laughter of the young men, had no more success than my warning. It was in the fashion, and there was no reply to this for a provincial lioness. All did not end with these ball-room criticisms ; and the *marguillier*, charged with the task of observation by the curate of Uzerche, for the purpose of reporting to him the doings and looks of his sweet flock, did not forget, in his report, the *corsage* and shoulders of my cousin.

The next day at mass the text was accordingly the dangers of a ball and of worldly pleasures. After a fearful picture of the horrible sufferings destined to balance the joys of this life in everlasting hell, M. le curé turned to Mademoiselle Matere, who was not two steps from his pulpit, and uttered the following peroration, in the thundering voice of a prophet :—

“ Woe, three times woe, to this age of iniquity, in which one beholds a mother her-

self lead her daughter to the schools of Satan ; in which one sees a young Christian, desperate at counting three-and-twenty virgin years, trust not to the grace of God, but to the grace of her shoulders, for catching a husband. Believe me, brethren, that the wrath of God shall fall on charms conjured up by the sorcery of fashion ; and the honest man will not choose a wife by such marks of distinction.”

I know not how the poor girl, thus admonished, could support this public humiliation ; nor can I conceive how her father and brother could restrain their wrath. Every mouth repeated the words of this address—every charitable feminine in the parish commented on them.

The Matere family for some time remained embroiled with their spiritual guide ; but as in the provinces the dignity of certain positions does not permit their holders to be contented with a vicar as confessor, Easter brought peace and forgetfulness.

Religion in Limousin is but a compound of fanaticism and superstition. The clergy of the country parts appeared to me generally very ignorant and intolerant ; the pulpit often be-

coming the echo of scandal, and the first stone being too often thrown by the shepherd of the flock himself. In the devotion of the women there is a total absence of *juste milieu*. Some sacrificing to the “what will people say,” fulfil with as much negligence as coldness the *form* of their religious duties; while others, whom they call *menettes*, forget their household for the church, their husbands for their confessor, utter as many prayers as scandals, and if they give no alms to their *suffering* brethren, load with sweet confections their curé who suffers not. The churches are dirty and dilapidated; divine service is celebrated without calm or gravity; fasting and abstinence are preached to poor people who live on herbs and black bread; the vanity and dangers of the things of this world are denounced to poor wretches who possess not even the vanity of cleanliness, and who know nothing beyond their pigs, their fowls, and their privations. What a difference between such sermons and those of the simple-hearted curé of Villers-Hellon, who taught our peasants to assist and mutually love each other; to offer prayers amid their labours; and who said to the old men, “Blessed

are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" to the children, "tell the truth, and honour your parents;" who taught families honesty, and young girls virtue. Superstition, all mighty amongst the Limousins, still exists in the middle ranks.

On arriving at Glandier, I was told that the spirits of the old monks revisited the earth, and that Madame Buffière had seen several of these ghostly confessors in the cloisters. Madame Lafarge, who had no religious principles, and perhaps did not even believe in the Gospel, most firmly believed in the devil. She told me, that having forgotten one day to make the sign of the cross on her daughter's cradle, to conjure the demon, the malicious spirit had overturned the barcelonnette, and left the blue traces of his black nails on the neck of the unhappy child.

Before returning to Glandier, it was agreed that I should have an opportunity of admiring the little capital of La Corrèze; and as M. Lafarge had some business to transact there, M. Pontier accompanied us to act as my chaperon during his absence.

Tulle is deliciously situated for the lovers

of the picturesque. The houses, ranged upon the slopes of two little hills, seem to have there placed themselves as if in curiosity, to look upon their own Corrèze, and overlook the diligences as they roll under the avenues of the promenade ;—the dwellings of the lower classes, dirty, frail, and without order, are grouped at the top of the amphitheatre—those of the wealthy burgesses form a cincture to the river of regular and civilised-looking houses.

The interior of the town is frightful ; the streets are staircases, filthy, narrow, and difficult as the paths to Paradise ; the houses disclose to the spectator a profound misery. Dark-looking men, sooty and unshaven, make the anvil ring under their blows ; while women, sitting at the threshold of their doors, exchange volleys of slander, from one end of the street to the other, administering at intervals innumerable boxes on the ear to the numberless children who are wrangling for chestnuts at their feet. Carriages are prohibited in Tulle—they would indeed be useless in these scarpèd streets ; accordingly there is no society, every one living for himself and by himself. The belles Tulloises, who are sufficiently plain, em-

ploy themselves in their households, but still more in those of their neighbours; they go to three balls in the winter for the sake of finding subjects for scandal; and when the balls fail to afford them, call to their assistance the ever-new and potent arms of calumny. As for the men, they pass their lives in the cafés, or at the halls. They are almost wholly advocates, attorneys, physicians, and republicans. Some few possess both talent and rascality, but most of them the rascality without the talent.

After having made a visit to the prefect, and some friends of M. Lafarge, M. Pontier made me admire the manufactory of arms at Souliac; then, in spite of him, impelled by an irresistible impulse, I insisted on seeing the prison, the burial-ground, and also the hall of justice.

It was assize-time. A poor girl, accused of infanticide, stood at the bar; and I was struck with astonishment as I, for the first time, beheld the array of human justice, so lacking majesty, and so sadly sinister. Neither thought nor understanding was visible on the brows of the jurymen, and the foreheads of the bench were as destitute of dignity. I was very soon about to quit that terrible hall, when I was

detained by the eloquent and impressive speech of the young advocate who defended the accused. The poor girl was acquitted; and the same evening, when M. Pontier persuaded me to scale the rocks that overlooked Tulle, I was pleased to meet the young defender who in the morning had made me feel so deeply. I was pleased that my uncle introduced him to me; pleased that he joined our party, and that the very sincere compliments I paid him appeared to be received by his heart more than his vanity.

Night, enveloped in her light veils of mist, had not yet donned her coronet of stars; work had ceased; the *Angelus* echoed in the distance; some birds were already sleeping, while others, perched above their nests, warbled with a sweet monotony to their companions. We followed a narrow path, which neither allowed the support of an arm, nor permitted conversation. Only when the vast panorama stretched at our feet gave me a new impression, I turned to my two guides to make them share it; and several times surprised the eye of M. Lachaud, which, fixed upon me, appeared to interrogate, to study, and to divine my thoughts. That look, severe and suspicious

during our walk, expressed at our return a sympathetic sadness: it appeared to protect me, to defend me, and to promise me a friend for the future.

I saw M. Lachaud no more until the days of my sorrow; then he was the first at my side—and I expected him.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER these three weeks of visiting, which were for the most part tedious enough, I was glad to find myself *at home*, and commenced with courage my part of Robinson Crusoe. Having six bricklayers at my disposal, I at once forgot the agreeable in the useful. I had part of the mansion, which was in a state of ruin, shut up. I had workmen to repair the roof—locksmiths for the doors and to the windows; but all this went on so slowly and so ill, and the work of the evening had so often to be undone in the morning, that winter advanced quicker than our labours, and I despaired for this year to shelter myself from the rain and frost. In the interior of the mansion I obtained more satisfactory results. Seconded by a good domestic, whom M. Lafarge had obtained for me from Paris, I had esta-

blished the despotic reign of cleanliness. The carpets descended from the top of the commodes to the humility of warming our feet ; the old walls were stripped of their spiders' drapery ; and the dust was exiled to the garret, along with the luxurious red hangings, which were replaced by modest calico curtains of a dazzling whiteness.

In my own chamber I united all which could minister to the comfort of my life—my favourite books, my work, and my piano. A large table placed in the middle was covered with all that was necessary for writing ; the chimney-piece and the commode were strewn with the souvenirs of my infancy and my girlhood ; and around me were the portraits of those I had loved, encouraging me with their looks, smiling on my efforts and at my anxiety to be happy.

I could never believe that the souls of those absent friends who have preceded us into eternity content themselves with a few tears and prayers. No ! according to my ideas, they wish that their memories should preserve us from evil, and that our life should be sufficiently pure to honour their memory and deserve their blessing.

The most difficult part of my reform was that which attacked the numberless abuses and intolerable dirtinesses of the kitchen and the service of the table. In that country, where all business is transacted and all pleasures commence or terminate at table—where friendship consists much more in a tender interchange of dinner than of thoughts, the art of cooking is one of seduction, indispensable in young wives, who rarely trust to mercenary hands that great instrument of household pleasure and allure-ment.

There is no Limousin husband so ill-humoured who cannot be pacified by an excellent cup of coffee: a wife is all-powerful when she can cook a hare *à la royale*. A potato-salamander which has not been burnt is an infallible remedy for jealousy; and the mistress of a family who knows how to vanquish the difficulties of confectionary has almost acquired the right of deceiving *her spouse* with impunity. Grand dinners last four or five hours; and as the number of dishes is known and commented on by the whole neighbourhood, quality must necessarily be sacrificed to quantity. The company sits down, then, round a table covered with

a countless throng of large and small dishes, combined in a manner that enable them to arrange the largest number possible. Every joint of veal or mutton has a rendezvous there under different shapes; roast pullets contemplate boiled ones with an air of contempt; ducks served with olives make the modest ducks with turnips grow pale with anger. The dinner is, in fact, a gastronomic and ferocious parody of the massacre of the innocents.

The interval between the first and second course is a critical moment for the mistress of the house. Her unquiet eye follows the dishes which they bring in, and observes the manner in which they place them. A servant forgets the symmetry of the table—the lady blushes and makes uncomprehended signs—rises with vexation to re-establish the order of battle, while she scolds the rude peasant who has played so ill his part of *maitre d'hôtel*.

This second part of the dinner, which has only caused the death of five rôtis, is in revenge composed of every known vegetable, of creams of all colours, and cakes of all kinds. At last, when the dessert is placed on the table, after a crisis more violent still than the first for the

amiable hostess, the gaiety becomes more noisy. The butterflies which perch on the cakes ; the doves that repose on the top of the biscuits of Savoy ; the burning hearts which are pierced with arrows on the top of the macaroons,—become the texts of the most gallant wit and the most piquant pleasantries. Then the young persons blushing discuss the sentimental romances of Mademoiselle Puget. The mothers sing songs of the Directory ; and the merry songs of the fathers and the husbands terminate joyously the charming reunion. Besides the dinners, there are déjeûners - dînatoires, almost as long and as sumptuous ; lunches, indispensable in country visits ; and lastly, pancakes, which agreeably replace the lectures and morning concerts of other parts of France. Some time after my arrival, having visited a physician who was one of M. Lafarge's friends, I accepted the offer of *refreshment* ; and after waiting two hours, they brought me red wine, white wine, liqueurs, and a large calf's head dressed *au naturel*.

The kitchen, that sanctuary of the Limousin wife, where she passes the greater part of her household life, should be a clean

and elegant laboratory, worthy those great artistes — it is nothing of the kind. It is always dirty, damp, and disorderly. The fowls walk over the tables, the children cry there, dogs and cats abound there, and make it their residence. When I required that the kitchen at Glandier should be clean every day at every hour, promises, threats, and recompenses were necessary to obtain it from the domestics of the country ; but I could never altogether banish the villanous fowls and pigs, which in this province replace the beautiful sheep of Picardy.

I had great trouble to obtain a few alterations in the arrangements of the table. There were several half rebellions when I substituted two for the four habitual meals, when I required that the linen should be scrupulously clean, and the plate cleaned every day. The first time I had company to dinner, having had the forty dishes of etiquette replaced by four modest entrées, and having large vases of flowers and fruit placed on the table, my mother-in-law was in despair ; and having vainly supplicated me, in the name of the honour of the house, not to retrench the proper number

of dishes, ran in tears to reclaim the *rights* of her son, in order to compel me to yield.

Those rights were scarcely expressed; I made M. Lafarge understand by a kiss that *I* was in the right; and at the hour of dinner, perceiving that, in spite of my order, they had considerably exceeded my bill of fare, I boldly had the surplus carried back to the kitchen.

This act of authority put an end to all discussion; and it is but proper to state, that the discontent of Madame Lafarge did not endure above a week. I had begged my mother-in-law to remain at the head of the house: this she had refused; and, in my turn, I would not accept a government controlled in the eyes of my servants, nor, while I willingly received suggestions, permit perfidious critiques to be made to my husband.

My mother-in-law loaded me with caresses, flatteries, and attention; yet I perceived that she was very jealous of my empire over her son, and that she tried to destroy it. I pardoned her: the heart of a mother should scarcely bear to share the tender affection of a child, and I was fully aware of all the *essen-*

tial qualities which I wanted to gain the entire sympathy of Madame Lafarge. Our habits separated us even more than our ages. Having always been very plain, with a husband who was very faithless, she had been compelled to seek in the bustle of her household for all her enjoyments, and her ideas were consequently singularly contracted to that object. My mother-in-law suspected every thing and every body; was mysterious in her words, still more so in her actions; and passed her days locked up in her chamber, the door of which, double-bolted, was not opened without infinite precautions. That chamber was the most curious of any in the house. Madame Lafarge kept her provisions and her small culinary apparatus there: turkeys fed in one corner, cheeses grew mouldy in another. The fire-place was unceasingly encumbered with saucepans and coffee-pots. She would not permit my domestics to touch it with a broom, and the maids did not even dare to enter the room for the purpose of making her bed. Madame Lafarge still preserved the custom of going to bed without undressing; only at night she turned

her shawl inside out, to reverse it again with the first blush of Aurora.

As for Madame Buffière, my sister-in-law, she was a little termagant, who led her husband and her mother, who feared her, by the nose ; and was herself similarly led by a clerk, who had become a partner in their concern. This M. Magnaud, who had but one eye, from his vulgar and gross manners, as well as his trifling conversation and impertinent familiarity, became insupportable to me. Knowing, however, that my sister-in-law *loved him like a brother*, I endeavoured not to be rude to him, although I kept him at a respectful distance, whose bounds I never suffered him to pass.

This little colony, of my sister-in-law and my *two brothers-in-law*, which daily joined our own, left shortly after my arrival for a forge they had rented at Fayes. I was not much grieved by this *crescendo* of solitude. Madame Buffière loved me with too great an excess of words and kisses for me to think her very sincere. She was not without wit ; but she was one of those subtle and shrewd spirits, who call a smile to the lip, but produce no echo in the heart. In short, M. Lafarge having recom-

mended me to be very reserved and cautious in my conversations with her, I saw her depart with more joy than sadness.

At the moment of her departure, little Adelaide Buffière clung to my neck with such despair, that I entreated her mother to trust me with her for the winter. She consented; and that good little creature, who loved me, became my daily companion. When I played the piano, she would dance; if I sang, she would listen and weep; and when I was occupied in embroidering, she sat at my feet and learnt her alphabet.

M. Lafarge, occupied in his business, passed his mornings in making out accounts, and receiving the dealers who came to him to sell wood or purchase iron. I rarely saw him before mid-day. Having sometimes sought him in his bureau, I remarked that my presence always seemed to annoy and constrain him; so I resolved never again to set my foot in that sanctuary of business.

After breakfast, we went to superintend the labours of some masons, as also those of eight pioneers, who had been placed entirely under my orders, to level the environs of the ruin,

which I wished to surround with sweet shrubs and evergreens. I had formed an immense plan, which was to be realised bit by bit, and which I hoped to accomplish in six years. Absolute mistress of all the details of improvement, every thing I decided upon was sure to be agreed to without discussion; and M. Lafarge appeared enchanted, when, with a level in one hand, or a square in the other, I surveyed the proportions of the gothic windows in my little gallery, or traced out the curves of a path. Thence we would go to the forge; and it became my turn to share in his ideas of improvement; to listen and to be instructed. Sometimes we rode out together to make acquaintance with some lovely view; at other times we went on foot through forests in search of some beautiful mountain-flowers, and I would return with bunches of heath and purple foxglove, garlands of honeysuckle, and hops, which M. Lafarge had sought among the thorns, for the purpose of making me a festive crown. In the evening, I read my favourite books aloud, or played the airs which had soothed my childhood, or the ballads of his province. Sometimes I would sing some sad

romance; but then he slept, and my dark thoughts would return upon me, and I was miserable, alarmed, and not very amiable until the morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MONTH after my arrival at Glandier, I was invited to the baptism of one of M. Tourdonnet's daughters. My first visit to St. Martin took place consequently in the midst of a *fête*, which had assembled his numerous family. They were cheerful, and I found among them the amiable and polished usages of Parisian life. Madame de Tourdonnet was a charming little woman, all red and white, with a pretty little hand and foot, with the rare virtue there of neglecting culinary perfection to play the part of a ladylike hostess. M. Tourdonnet revived in his little circle the noble and cordial hospitality of our ancient chevaliers. His words and looks gave you the most sincere welcome. He received you with heart and soul. In talking with M. Tourdonnet, we were always removed from those common-places which be-

long to the dominion of positive and ordinary life. He was satirical on opinions, without being so on persons; and in his firm determination never to agree with others, propounded the most original ideas, and gave rise to the most amusing and animated discussions.

There was no female to whom I was a stranger in this little *fête*, which brought together all the old friends of the family, and some young men intimately connected with M. de Tourdonnet. Amongst these, I remarked M. le Marquis de Corhn, who, by his distinguished manners, free from the slightest pretension, his noble mien and handsome face, made me dream upon the means of metamorphosing him into a cousin, and of transplanting into our solitude, with his assistance, an elegant relative whom I dearly loved.

Having passed the night at St. Martin, the next day was devoted to visiting the beautiful château in detail. Its gardens are elegantly laid out, and its beautiful meadows and woods, which stretch to a considerable distance round it, make it a superb agricultural property. I left this place with the desire to return often,

and become the friend of its kind inhabitants. Rough roads doubled the distance between us, but that was a difficulty which a horse easily overcame; and I already knew the thickets, rocks, and ravines of the Limousin roads so well, that, far from dreading, I felt a certain pleasure in braving them, and in not suffering my speed to be slackened by such trifling obstacles.

A short time after this period, I was unwell, and obliged to keep my bed with a burning fever, and horrible pains in the head. During this short illness, M. Lafarge passed all the days by my side. He did not even trust me by night entirely to Clementine's care, and rose many times to visit me with the most restless anxiety. One evening, when I had been sadly stricken by intelligence from my friends in Alsace, I felt myself much worse; and M. Lafarge watched by me the whole night. Towards midnight the blood rushed to my head, the extremities of my limbs contracted—became cold; I had scarcely power to speak, and soon after lost my consciousness.

When I recovered from this state, I saw every one in the house around me. M. La-

farge, sobbing on his knees near my bed, warmed my hands with his breath, crying out that he would not survive me, but would die if I should die. Clementine wept, and sprinkled cold water over my head. Madame Lafarge looked on with a frightened air; while some women and some of our workmen were praying on their knees at a distance in the alcove. I could not yet speak; but moved by all this grief, I tried to press the hand of M. Lafarge, who, perceiving me revive, embraced me with transports of joy.

This despair, these testimonies of love and of gladness, which saluted my return to life, touched me deeply,—my eyes, my words, expressed it; and I was happy to revive, and feel myself so well beloved. I was therefore, when the physician arrived, almost calm. M. Lafarge told him that I had suffered from congestion of the brain, and that he had saved me by applying blisters to my feet, cold water to my head, and bathing my hands in hot water. Dr. Bardon did not agree with him, but attributed my alarming state to a nervous attack. I had suffered so much, and M. Lafarge was so pleased to have saved my life, that the deci-

sion, not very delicately expressed, of his Esculapian friend did not lessen my gratitude, and I did not doubt of the danger from which he had preserved me.

I had never feared death; but the thought of dying separated from my sister, and far from those I loved, without any time to leave them all that love and my latest thoughts, appalled me. Above all, I felt that the earth would lie heavy on me in a strange country, amid unknown dead. I made M. Lafarge swear that he would send me to sleep my eternal slumber near my dear grandfather, in the shelter of the prayers, the thoughts, and the flowers, which would be lavished on me in the cemetery of Villers-Hellon.

On the following day, Clementine came to me when I was awake with a mysterious air, and gave me a large letter from M. Lafarge.

“Why this letter? what has happened?” I asked.

“Nothing, Madame; but Monsieur, who loves you so much, has made his will. He has read it to me, and I heard it with tears. He desired me to give it you secretly, and to tell you to conceal it among your papers.”

I did not immediately comprehend this resolution of M. Lafarge ; but after reading the wish he expressed to be interred near me at Villers-Hellon, I recalled to mind the prayer I had made on the previous evening, and was touched to the bottom of my soul by the delicacy and love which there was in this proceeding. I even wept a few sweet tears when my husband entered the chamber. I expressed tenderly to him the emotion his conduct had caused me, and then chid him for preserving these sad thoughts of death.

“ Yesterday you have learnt,” he said to me, “ on how slight a thread hangs life ; it caused me, alas ! to reflect, that if I died suddenly, my fortune would not come to you ; even your own would perhaps be compromised by a ruinous participation in commerce. What I have during my life is yours, and shall be yours after my death. Now I am tranquil ; but to avoid discussion, or complete quarrel with my mother and my sister, I ask you to preserve the greatest secrecy touching this proof of my affection for you.”

I promised this to him, and determined also to make a will, but without mentioning it to

him ; for I feared I might wound him by appearing rather to follow his example than obey the dictates of my own heart. I had never executed a deed of this nature, and knew no more of law than that which suffices to marry us. I should consequently have been much embarrassed in making my will, had I not thought of copying the text of those parts in the will of M. Lafarge, which seemed to render our testaments valid in the eyes of the law. But I could not imitate his generous donation. My affection to my sister, and the aunt-like love I already felt for the little child she was about to present us both, rendered it impossible for me wholly to abandon all my fortune. I therefore left all that I possessed to M. Lafarge, with the liberty of employing it as he chose, without limit or restriction, during his life, but with an obligation that it should be restored after his death as a dowry for my sister's eldest daughter. I also disposed of all the little jewels which were dear to me in legacies to those who loved me ; and not knowing whom I could charge with these last wishes, that they might not be annulled or frustrated, but be religiously observed, I entrusted with their

execution Madame Lafarge, who swore not to mention the subject to her son, but to preserve it secret and sealed until her death or mine. My mother-in-law appeared pleased and touched with what I had done, and thanked me a thousand times for the provident affection I displayed for her son.

I was not yet quite convalescent, when one of my labourers came to make me a present of a basket of apples, beautiful enough to have lineally descended from the first apple of creation. M. Lafarge was desirous of using this beautiful fruit for an exhibition of his dexterity; and after a few pretty passes with them, managed to throw the largest apple through a window, which he broke in shivers. I should easily have consoled myself for this destruction by laughing at the appalled vanity of M. Lafarge; but the weather was cold and damp, and I found the contact of the air did my convalescent head very little good. I sent to Uzerche for a glazier—he was ill; another resided at Lubersac—he was gathering his vintage: at last I was resigning myself with some ill-humour to the base necessity of submitting to a paper square, when it came into

my head to employ one of Madame de Léautaud's diamonds for the purpose of cutting a large sheet of glass which I had preserved in a cabinet, and which might thus replace the broken pane.

In an instant I went to seek the little reticule which contained them, and was drawing one of the little diamonds out, when M. Lafarge entered, and, finding me thus occupied, began to interrogate me as to the when, the why, and the how, after the usual fashion of our lords and masters. To my great concern, instead of attending to my new trade, I was obliged to relate him a history, in which I had to conceal some things and explain many others—in short, to make a Limousin husband understand that there are delicacies which prohibit the betrayal, even to him, of the name of a compromised and trusting friend.

M. Lafarge would not only see the useful diamond, but also all the others which were in the reticule. He weighed them, estimated them, sought their value in his books on metallurgy. In short, I had exhausted all my patience, when, to increase my misfortune, in came Madame

Lafarge, and he made her admire the lustre of all the little gems which lay glittering in the sun.

“ Oh,” cried she, “ how beautiful ! and how valuable they must be ! Tell me, Marie, who gave them to you ? Why do you not use them ? Why have you said nothing about them to me ? It is quite a treasure ! ” I answered rather harshly, that it was no treasure of mine. Then came a thousand other questions ; and M. Lafarge seeing that I reddened with impatience, took away his mother, and made me a sign to be silent. I should have been miserable at my indiscretion and imprudence, had I not felt that sooner or later it would have been indispensable that I should confide the matter to my husband, that the diamonds might be returned to Madame de Léautaud, or sold, and the money sent to M. Clavé. The concurrence of M. Lafarge would have been to me both a moral and material necessity.

When M. Lafarge returned to me, he appeared delighted.

“ Come ! ” said he, “ be content ; for I managed the matter delightfully. I have made

my mother believe that the diamonds are yours; but that you did not wish them seen until you had sufficient to form a *parure*."

"Such a tale is beyond belief!"

"My mother believed it, however, very easily; but you know nothing of business. When one is engaged in commerce, we must throw dust in the eyes of the world; and the richer I make you out, the richer shall I become."

"I must confess to you, that I do not much desire a fortune gained by such means."

"I do not ask you to employ them; leave me to do so alone."

"At least let me entreat you to prevent Madame Lafarge from hawking *your* diamond-story."

"My mother will do what I wish her; she was thunderstruck when I told her they were worth 30,000 francs."

"I wonder at your exaggeration, when you know they are scarcely worth 6000."

After we had used the diamond to cut the glass with, I found it useless to replace it and the others in their reticule; and I enclosed them in a box, that M. Lafarge might deposit for

security in his strong room. Not daring to put the name of Madame de Léautaud upon the box, I wrote thereon that of Lecointe, an honest man, Marie's jeweller, to whom we might have entrusted the secret, in case of absolute necessity.

CHAPTER XV.

SINCE I had first learnt to ride, I had dreamt of and desired a grey mare, light and swift as the vapoury clouds which run over the heaven after the storm. What, then, were my joy and my gratitude, when a delightful attention came one day to realise the fairy dream of ten years!

In accompanying M. Lafarge on a visit to some woods, in the neighbourhood of the Pompadour breeding-stables, we met a good priest, lamenting on the way-side the kicking ingratitude of his horse, whose saintly education had never been able to subdue its capricious humour—who found a malicious pleasure in trying the patience, of compromising the gravity as well as the skull, of its venerable master. The malignant little animal, freed from her rider and her saddle, neighed and leaped with joy, letting the wind play with her mane, or browsed

disdainfully the flowers of some blooming hay ; then approaching her poor victim with pretended modesty, she gave him hope of catching her bridle, and then escaped again, to indulge in her wild gallops, her kicks, and her boundings.

This scene amused me ; I own, to my shame, I had more sympathy for the wild rebel than pity for her respectable owner. And I was still thinking of her, when, on the morrow, as I awoke, M. Lafarge announced to me that he had purchased the curé's pretty mare ; and that it was mine, certainly mine, and mine alone.

I leapt out of bed to give a welcome and provender to my new companion ; and as they told me she had Arab blood in her veins, I baptised her with the name of Arabska.

It was a charming animal, not four years old, of an elegant colour, with gazelle-like feet, and a character original, capricious, and very independent. I entered with pleasure on the task of breaking her in. At first she tried to throw me ; but seeing I laughed at her vain endeavours, and preferring my caresses to my whip, she began to love and to obey me like a lamb. Our tastes were the same : not knowing

how to go at a moderate or equal pace, sometimes she shot away like an arrow, sometimes crawled along with nonchalance, watching the butterflies as they flew, or listening to the voice of the breeze. Sometimes lively and bold, when she perceived an obstacle her eyes flashed, and she turned towards me to implore from me the order to brave it; at other times timid and fearful, she trembled at a bird or her own shadow, and was only reassured on hearing my voice, or feeling my hand as it played with her mane; then would she neigh with a singular expression of pride and joy.

Arabska, in enabling me to go abroad at all times, also enabled me to go much further from home; and, thanks to her, I was enabled to admire the noble and proud stallions of the Pompadour stables. In that establishment, the racers, selected for their beauty, after having been slaves, become tyrants, and make tributary to their well-being the arms, the time, and the understanding of many men consecrated to these animals by the government.

They had told me I should find some gentlemanly officers at Pompadour: I confess that I took small pains to assure me of the fact,

charmed and interested as I was by the truly chivalrous tenants of that sweet retreat.

Another of my excursions conducted me to an aunt of M. Lafarge, whose talents, understanding, and writings, they had often mentioned to me with pride. In person she was little, invariably shadowed by a huge green and yellow hat, as poetical as an *omelette aux fines herbes*. My aunt received me with two learned kisses, the most beautiful of all phrases, and said gravely to a sub-lieutenant of infantry of sixty, whom she held by the hand,—

“Dearest, bow to this amiable niece, who comes into our deserts like the dove of the ark, bearing a branch of myrtle instead of a branch of olive. Panzani, my love, embrace your niece—she allows it—and then go and gather her a rose. He does not understand a word of French—he is a Corsican,” she said to me in a whisper; “but if he speaks ill, he knows well how to love. Our marriage was quite a romance. He was dying with love for me, and my bewildered heart sacrificed on the altar of Hymen a life that I had determined on consecrating to the chaste sisters of Apollo.”

Madame Panzani was silent; I found time

to breathe, take off my hat, and we seated ourselves at the table. Her *déjeuner* was most learned; all the dishes of which it consisted had been made after *historical* receipts. The Jews, Greeks, and Romans, had been consulted for our first course; the *Cuisinier Impérial*, the *Cuisinier Royal*, the *Cuisiniere Bourgeoise*, the *Maison Rustique*, and the *Journal des Connaissances utiles*, had presided over her *entremets*; and lastly, the entire dessert had been composed after secrets borrowed from nuns of the middle ages, wives of directors of the *grand siècle*, and young unmarried ladies of the age we live in. M. Lafarge, who had business at Brives, proposed to me to remain a day at La Côte. I acceded with pleasure; and Madame Panzani was all kindness to me. She shewed me her mulberry-trees, approved and applauded by an agricultural committee; her monstrous potatoes, which were to fatten the future ages of Limousin; her beet-roots, which were to sweeten them; and her gooseberry-wine, which was to intoxicate them. In addition, she told me that M. Gauthier d'Uzerche studied her *pruneaux composés*, with the intention of submitting them to the taste of the Chamber of Depu-

ties, and that two academicians had congratulated her on the cultivation of her sorrel—*Panzani-multifolia*!

On returning from our promenade, my aunt talked exclusively of literature and history. Bewailing the indolence of our writers, she drew out of her cabinet a mountain of manuscripts, and said she wished to consult me on a history of France before the deluge, which she intended bestowing on her country. In effect, having put on her spectacles, hemmed, and cleared her throat modestly, she instructed me for four hours on the deeds and actions of our antediluvian kings.

What erudition!!! I was stupified, appalled at my ignorance, and I trembled for our grandchildren at this additional amount of history to learn.

Pharamond, how I execrated thee! After having given us so many silly descendants, have you actually the impudence to pretend to ancestors, and to make us sicken and yawn over the fathers of the fathers of your fathers?

Madame Panzani's castle was situated in a lovely position—the mountains of the Saillant—the meadows watered by the Vézère—the vine-

yards and rich corn-fields stretched out beneath the little terrace. The interior of the house displays an artistical disorder and originality. Books encumbered the tables and chairs: some dried on their learned leaves simples, champignons, and pears; fruits of every kind were confectioning in glass bottles; and the inkstand also fulfilled the function of a salt-cellar. Under a portrait of Napoleon hung M. Panzani's martial shako, which, in its discreet lining concealed the false hair, curl-papers, and pearl powder of the female author. While the sabre, which was formerly used in combat with the Bedouin, served as a support for superb bunches of grapes and bunches of morilla cherries. During the evening I passed at La Côte we had a dreadful storm. Madame Panzani, in affright, assembled her labourers around her, set them all praying on their knees, and commanded her little servant to sing, with all the strength of his lungs, the psalms of *la pénitence*; while she busied herself in counting her rosary, sometimes stopping to conceal her fear in the bosom of her old and unconcerned beloved one. When the

thunder raged most heavily, the châtelaine would call to her little saboted groom—

“Baptistou, my darling ! sing thy *complainte d’Alger*.”

And then, turning towards her spouse, she murmured to him,

“Then you were in all your glory, my duck ; you forgot love.”

If a flash called her back to her terrors, she would cry—

“Quick, Baptistou ; sing your psalm again.”

And Baptistou shouted saintly with the tempest ; the labourers prayed ; and the rosary passed through her fingers rapidly.

On the next day, when I was dressing, I took a decanter of water from the chimney-piece, drank a glass of it, and was about to use the rest in my ablutions, when Madame Panzani entered my chamber, and recoiled in affright.

“Oh, good God !” she cried, “you have swallowed all my holy water. You have profaned it : perhaps you have even defiled it with your cheeks ! Lord Jesus ! if it be an involuntary sacrilege, have mercy on us !” And

while lamenting thus, she poured back her holy water piously into its saintly vessel; and I had great difficulty to make her understand that, instead of being damned, I ought to be purified and blessed.

CHAPTER XVI.

My rides and my visitor did not cause me to forget the forge. I went there incessantly. The founders were proud to initiate me into the slightest details of their art; and when the fruit-sellers of the *bas* Limousin came there with their mules loaded with melons, peaches, and grapes, I used to buy all their charge for a few sous, and distribute it among these poor parched people, made thirsty by the furnace of their little hell.

Almost every evening, at ten, M. Lafarge unmoored the boat, and we went to assist at the casting of the font. It was poetically beautiful to see the flames light, with an infernal radiance, the rocks against which the lofty furnace was erected, and the meadows that stretched out at their feet. In that half light the willows were transformed into weep-

ing nymphs, the poplars into giants; and the limes were changed into sylphs, who danced to the song of the crickets. In the hall, the master-founder gave his orders in a sonorous voice, whilst his panting and hurried assistants managed the fire, skimmed the dross from the surface of the melted mass, and then, at a signal given by him, lifting the barrier, let the ocean of fire meander through the canals opened in the sand. Thousands of blue sparks rose from those burning streams, and leapt and died away in the darkness, then glittered again and vanished, leaving the forge in silence and in shadow.

We usually returned to the house conversing together. M. Lafarge, who kept me a stranger to the state of his affairs, imparted to me alone his ideas as to their improvement; and in particular spoke to me of an important discovery which he believed he had made, the results of which occupied him night and day. Having studied, to please him, and in order to understand him, the large "Iron-master's Manual," I was enabled to encourage and approve him, and to indulge reasonable pride in seeing him quit the dull path of routine, and take to the

noble one of improvement and progress. His discovery was this :—

According to the common method, the metal fused by the action of fire is poured into sand-moulds, and forms on cooling thick bars of smelted ore, technically called "*gueuses*." These *gueuses*, in order to be reduced to a metallic state, are a second time fused by heat; by which means the metallic particles are freed from impure gases and dross, and then collected into a large ball (called technically a "*loupe*"), which the forging hammers, plied by machinery, shape into angles, rods, pigs, &c.

Abandoning this antiquated plan, M. Lafarge wished to cause the liquid ore to flow directly into the refining furnace, destined to reduce the pigs once smelted into a second state of fusion, and thus effect a saving of time, labour, and the charcoal employed in remelting the *gueuses*; reducing, in short, the expenses one-third by this new method. I thought the process so simple, so easily adopted, and so preferable to the old one, that I concluded it must be already practised in other mining districts, and was only unknown in remote Limousin. I might, however, have convinced myself of

the contrary by perusing the latest treatises on the manufacture of iron. Then I feared it must be indispensable to smelt the ore twice in order to obtain iron of good quality; and M. Lafarge promised to make an experiment in hopes of destroying the only doubt I had left. I was not learned enough to comprehend the chemical explanations, which only bewildered without convincing me; and, in honour of my incredulity, I exacted the substitution of practice for theory.

The experiment was exceedingly difficult to make. It was necessary to bear a whole day's impatient alternations of hopes and fears; and when, towards evening, M. Lafarge brought me in triumph a superb sample of iron, I shared his emotion, and congratulated him with much joy and pride.

My husband communicated his important discovery, in vague and general terms, to his brother-in-law; and as he did not speak of it to his clerks, I remained his only confidant. While all about us were asleep, I wrote, at his dictation, the results of his study and research. He imparted to me a perfect knowledge of the meaning of the technical terms, and then en-

trusted to me the final preparation of the essay he proposed to submit to the minister to obtain a patent of invention.

Although this new method was very simple, its execution demanded great care, an extensive knowledge of metallurgy, familiarity with the process of iron-smelting, and a considerable advance of capital. M. Lafarge, a lover of his trade from his childhood, united to fifteen years of constant practice and hard study an unconquerable perseverance, proof against all obstacles. The first difficulties could be easily conquered with time and labour; the last was not, however, so easy to overcome. I was told that a loan in that poor country, destitute of immediate connexion with the Paris bankers, was impossible. I knew that in order to sell my estates in Villers-Hellon, as I proposed to my husband, there must be first made a partition amongst minors—a tedious process. This difficulty of the immediate want of ready money embarrassed and worried me, and seemed insuperable; until M. Lafarge having told me that he was willing to pay a high interest and share the profits upon a loan, the investment appeared to me sufficiently advantageous to authorise my

application to my family and friends to render us a service, and at the same time benefit themselves.

When, after these very serious conversations, M. Lafarge reduced his projects to figures,—an occupation in which I was unable to assist him, confessing, to my shame, that I had never known how to count, except on my fingers,—I sat by castle-building—dreaming, in short, of a journey to Paris. Ten years were required to execute all our plans and bring them into full operation. During each of those years we were to spend only one month in Paris ; but, on the other hand, I was to be enabled to effect all sorts of improvement in our old mansion ; I was to receive my friends and my family ; I should have a daughter, or perhaps even a son, whom I would educate *à l'Anglaise*, who should learn German, English, and Italian in his cradle, &c. After these ten years of reason, we were to engage trustworthy attendants and clerks to take charge of the business, while we passed alternately six months in Paris and six at Glandier. We would travel ; I should marry my daughter ; my son would be diplomatically employed ; and M. Lafarge,

elected deputy, would extend even into La Corrèze sparks of civilisation and progress.

This career of industry and train of smiling future projects engaged my mind too absolutely for me to feel the void of my imagination, and I began to taste happiness in the common worldly acceptance of the word. I was become the friend and private counsellor of M. Lafarge, who was full of esteem and confidence, and paid me the most affectionate attentions. Too busy to be in love, he no longer required the ardent and impassioned speeches which I had never known how to speak—no longer exacted love with the law in his hand and the despotism of a creditor; and had, in short, become an excellent brother, whom I hoped in future to love a little more as a husband.

After the departure of M. Buffière, M. Lafarge sent to Paris for a head-clerk, whom he vaunted as a prodigy—why I could never discover. This was a young man named Denis, of rude manners, insidious voice, and sinister looks. I was astonished when, on accidentally asking him what forge-masters he had served, he replied that disastrous banking speculations having deprived him of his fortune, had driven

him to accept a situation at a restaurant's, and that he had never studied any other business. My vexation at the incredible heedlessness that had apparently dictated a choice of such importance, was such that I could not forbear reproaching M. Lafarge for neglect: but he assured me, in reply, that he had long known the inflexible honesty and unconquerable perseverance and activity of this man, and that his ignorance of the manufacture was of no importance, as his only business was to superintend and keep the books. Though he could not convince me, he conquered part of my repugnance to M. Denis.

I am ignorant whether my prejudices infected my husband, but he determined not to entrust his hopes of a patent to his head-clerk; and he waited till the last minute before dictating to him his essay, my handwriting being too illegible, in its independence, to be presented to a minister. As for Madame Lafarge, she seemed to estimate the new-comer still more highly than her son, constantly inviting him to dine and spend the evening with us. It was, however, so revolting to me to meet so frequently at table a vulgar and ill-bred man, who

could only be made to behave himself by being kept at a haughty distance, that I entreated my husband to request his mother to restrain the number of her invitations to M. Denis; and Madame Lafarge, resigning herself to entertain her protégé in the inaccessible fastness of her own room, never forgave me for having contrived his banishment from the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOWARDS the end of October I experienced a great joy,—that of receiving, for the first time, a member of my family; the delight of extending hospitality to a beloved friend. My poor Glandier was yet inhabitable only in my dreams; still I did all that was humanly possible to render it agreeable to my guests. I studied to make them forget what was wanting, by anticipating their habits, tastes, and wishes; and unable in my mountain-solitude to surprise or delight them by city luxuries, I provided for them good fires, lovely flowers, and smiling faces.

After having travelled post over rocks, ravines, and deserts, whose soil had never been trodden save by foot of mule, M. and Madame de Sabatié arrived in the middle of the

night, half-dead with fatigue, hunger, and jolting; after having entered the black gorge of Glandier as the mouth of the infernal regions, and fairly resigned themselves to go to the devil with cheerful hearts.

When I found myself again in my cousin's arms, after the exchange of innumerable kisses, questions, and inquiring looks, my happy past seemed mingling with my future, and her presence seemed to convert my solitude into a home. The power of the affections is boundless: the enjoyments of life, its insupportable griefs, have their source in them; and I conceive that the joys of heaven can only consist in the empire of the affections, purified of the alloy of egotism and indifference that debases them on earth.

My cousin was suffering from fatigue; and apprehensive of a miscarriage. The days immediately following her arrival were therefore devoted to perfect repose and interminable conversations. What volumes we had to tell one another! Countless indispensable restrictions between a young wife and a single woman had hitherto prevented this intimate ex-

change of thoughts, so sweet when completely reciprocal and entirely unreserved. She told me the story of her marriage,—how in six weeks she had seen, loved, adored M. de Sabatié; how she had found a lover in her husband; how immeasurably the joys of reality had surpassed those of her maiden dreams.

I related, in return, what had led, as a termination to my romantic and poetical imaginings, to an interested and worldly match, in which I had not consulted my heart. I told her the magnificence of the corbeille; described the noble expedients employed to shut my eyes till the solemnisation of the marriage; then my awakening from my dream, my terror, the nervous grief that had closed “the happiest day of my life”—the journey, my disappointments, my letter to M. Lafarge and its frightful falsehoods, my despair, my treaty—M. Lafarge’s generous conduct, my quiet actual life, and happiness from morning till night.

My cousin was in ecstasies at my account—overwhelmed me with questions, bantering, and encouragement; and eventually went the length, in her indiscreet joy, of talking to M. Lafarge

of my letter, arguing the impossibility of its alleged facts of accusation, and ridiculing the credulity which had rendered him a complete dupe to the stratagem inspired by my maidenly terror, and the sight of my kingdom in ruins.

She absolutely wished to read the terrible letter; but M. Lafarge having told her that it was burnt, she was compelled to satisfy herself with some of its more striking passages with which my memory supplied me. This little confidence, at my expense, established a strong intimacy between my husband and Madame de Sabatié. He was pleased, and put no bounds to his confidence in his new relative, who applied to him for all information that I refused to afford her, and, in return, completely tranquillised his jealousy of the past.

With one word I could have stopped my cousin's amiable levity; but intoxicated by her love and happiness, she might not easily have understood me, and I was averse to a full disclosure. Painful experience is necessary to understand that the heart, once set bleeding by the shock of the deceptions of life, although it may manifest the outward calmness of indifference, the wound inflicted is always pain-

ful at intervals, and can never be effectually healed.

Often, at the sight of the impassioned affection of my cousin and her Edward, I felt with sorrow the scaffolding of happiness and reason that I had raised about my heart give way. They sometimes added to the enjoyment of their love the pleasures awakened in them by beauteous skies, the face of nature, music and poetry. When I beheld their hearts thus beat in unison, with the same emotion and the same enthusiasm, to repress my tears I was compelled to smile, and ridicule a happiness that I could not help envying in secret.

These days of union fled as swiftly as they were agreeably spent. We took long walks, and had longer conversations. I invited to parties the most pleasant of our neighbours, to procure my fair cousin the pleasure of being admired, to amuse her by the sight of our country fribbles, and provide food for mirth during our long evenings. Madame de Sabatié was satisfied and pleased with all she saw; she exerted herself to please in return, and even achieved the conquest of my mother-in-law. Six months' sojourn at

Thoulouse had made her understand the way of life and manners of the country; where a happy population, behind the progress of the century and the march of intellect, believe that virtue, good taste, and propriety, exist only amongst them, and would regard as a revolution the least inroad upon their solitudes of enlightened civic refinement.

Soon to pleasures succeeded long and serious business-interviews. M. de Sabatié had received with his wife an estate near Thoulouse, worth, I believe, about three hundred thousand francs. Never quitting Paris, he was desirous of disposing of a property which suffered in his absence, and of investing the proceeds with a view to the augmentation of his income. M. Lafarge proposed to him that he should lend the money on a mortgage of his works; he shewed him a statement of his position, similar to the one that had served as basis to our marriage-deed, and made him visit the fair and extensive domains, which he gave us all to understand, and which I believed, to belong to Glandier. Finally, he divulged to him his discovery, his hopes of a patent, and his gigantic project for the extension of his affairs.

My husband then proceeded to explain his want of a considerable advance of capital, indispensable in a country where all advantageous purchases are made for ready money; representing that nothing would be more easy than to raise a loan on mortgage in Paris, but that he was desirous of making one of my family participate the advantages of the investment; and offering to borrow two hundred thousand francs of Edward, at an interest of five per cent, and to give him, besides, a share in the profits of the projected improvement. He promised him, further, a salary of, I believe, ten thousand francs, to superintend the works which would be conducted in Paris by his clerks.

While our two husbands were calculating and making estimates, my cousin and I indulged delightful anticipations of those parts of the scheme that would affect our pleasures. She was to spend every summer with me at Glandier, and in the winter we were to dwell together in Paris; our pleasures were to be in common, and, our tastes being identical, our enjoyment would be doubled.

It was decided that M. Lafarge should set

out at the same time as M. de Sabatié; that the latter should introduce him to some persons of influence at the ministry of commerce; that they should finally settle the terms of their partnership in Paris; and that if Edward should be unable to find at once a purchaser for his estate, he should furnish, from his wife's portion, funds for the most urgent expenses.

My cousin wished to take me with her, anticipating the joy of my family and friends at my unexpected return to spend six weeks among them. My husband also pressed me to accompany him; he was unwilling to leave me in solitude, and expected that I should be of assistance to him in the steps he would have to take to obtain his patent. I, however, resisted their entreaties; I overcame my own desire to accompany them, determined to deck my spousal wreath with one first flower of reason and wisdom.

The alleged motive of my refusal was the absolute necessity of my presence to superintend the business left in the hands of strange and unskilled clerks, and my wish to employ all the money I should have expended on the journey in embellishing my poor little home

of Glandier : neither was my real motive less praiseworthy. Scarcely accustomed to my desert, I was unwilling to quit it before having introduced improvements which should endear it to me. I was not desirous of entering society with M. Lafarge, to expose him to comparisons unfavourable to him and sad and mortifying to myself ; I wished to re-enter it only protected by a confiding and solid affection. Fortified against myself, my resolution was unalterable ; and I tranquilly awaited the approaching day of departure and separation.

Still it was a sorrowful day when it came. I accompanied them to Uzerche ; and seated alone with my cousin in the carriage, I charged her with affectionate messages and tokens of remembrance for the dear and regretted friends whom she was shortly to meet. I looked at her long and stedfastly, in order to carry back her image into my solitude ; in her I beheld all my family, all my friends, all my past. I embraced her to conceal the agitation that shook me ; I spoke to her loudly and rapidly to distract my thoughts, to arrest the words of tenderness that rose to her lips, and that would have overpowered me if spoken. My husband

had permitted us to set out unaccompanied, at the instance of his mother, who had last and confidential communications to make to him previously to his departure. When he rejoined us near Vigois, his sorrow at parting was so loud, and his promises, advice, and exactions so clamorous, that he almost made me forget my own grief and resign myself to the separation.

When, having reached Uzerche, and bidden them finally adieu, I beheld their carriage disappear, I found it impossible to return to my apartment, and felt a choking sensation; and desiring one of my cousins to saddle his horse and my own, I galloped after the carriage, and reached it out of breath by the exertion. I was received with cries of surprise and joy; my friends would have made me accompany them in spite of my reason, but I spurred Arabska into a gallop, to avoid hearing their persuasions; and feeling my resolution restored by the cool breeze and the rapidity of my flight, after following them some time with my eyes, and waving with my hand a last adieu, I returned to Uzerche, without daring to turn my head for fear of yielding to the temptation of departing with the happy travellers.

M. Lafarge had made me promise not to return immediately to Glandier, but to pay a week's visit to a family of his acquaintance living at a pretty seat not far from Uzerche. The duty of concealing my grief, and tearing myself from my reminiscences to please my hosts, at the same time that it cost me much pain, gradually restored my reason and resolution.

I was welcomed with a cordiality which I then believed was sincere, but which was, in truth, nothing more than a speculation, and an investment of hospitality intended to return, for the winter evenings, a profitable revenue of commentaries, tattle, and scandal.

In this country, generally speaking, there is no study to give a visitor pleasure by flattering his habits and tastes ; the only study is to discover his failings, with a view to gratify, at his expense, the rampant love of gossip and slander that rules predominant in society. I am at a loss to understand the pleasure taken in attacking the private life, honour, and character of a poor inoffensive guest coming in search of sympathy or amusement. Society—which is only an interchange of superficial sentiments,

in which we seek not to express our real thoughts, but to which we fly to forget them—society ought not to pass judgment but on that part of ourselves which we yield to it as an exchange for the poor pleasures it bestows. To raise the veil of private life, to spy out the mysteries of the heart, in order to proclaim them to the world, is a cowardly profanation of social intercourse—is oftentimes an infamous crime. Surely society itself offers a sufficiently vast field for ridicule in its paraded vices and vanities. Why not laugh at the pretended man of wisdom courting an eulogium? at the old coquette who would have us discover grace and beauty in the wrinkles of her painted brow? Why not laugh to shame the prudes, the hypocrites, and unappreciated spirits, who, at every turn, drag their weakness into the sun? Laugh at these, censors; for their vices are born of you and for you, and the tribunal which they declare competent to flatter is still better fitted to unmask them, and hold them up to ridicule.

But I am digressing, though not far, from my subject. To return to the family at F * * *. Madame D * * * I found to be a good-natured,

kind creature, troubled with indigestion. M. D * * *, a rude boor, who cultivated his fields and suffered his mind to lie fallow, was an ill-tempered and dissatisfied being, only admiring nature in his fattest cattle. Several of their children were married: the only two at the farm were a daughter, ravenously fond of bread and butter, and a most agricultural son, who, after confirming his clownishness by a few months' residence in Paris, had married a fresh-coloured maiden, chosen for her weight by his father, and who had been educated, accomplished, and fattened at Limoges.

In the bosom of this seemingly kind and affectionate family, I spent several quiet and happy days. In the morning I cut patterns, and gave instructions in millinery to the women-folk, and, to their unspeakable stupefaction, unfolded the novel mysteries of my trousseau; then I used to walk out with Madame D * * *, admiring her fine fruit-trees, and the excellent order and economy of her household arrangements. I listened to her with interest, and sought to profit by her example and lessons. In the evenings I kept all the family dancing, while I played waltzes, quadrilles,

and *bourrées*, on an old spinet that had survived the orgies of the regency, the tempests of the revolution, and the conquests of Napoleon—which had resounded to *Vive Henri Quatre* under the restoration, to the *Parisienne* after the three glorious days, and under my fingers vibrated with the melodies of the *Postillon de Longjumeau*. Retired to my room, I passed part of the night writing to M. Lafarge.

His absence had left a void in my heart; and the privation of his affectionate cares taught me their full value. The pleasures of life do not consist alone in the affections bestowed, but also in those received; and the country, however remote, in which one is loved, cannot long remain a land of exile.

I was tenderly affected day by day at the reception of impassioned letters from M. Lafarge. In vain I sought in my esteem traces of passion answering to his own; I felt indignant, and almost despised myself for the insensibility of my heart; and when I recalled to mind all the words of love, the noble disinterestedness, and the affectionate confidence of my husband, I rejoiced in the use of tender expressions which, received at a distance, would

console him for my absence. In truth, when the night is not feared,—the long, dull night, so wearisome to those bound by law to love,—it is very easy to convert friendship, esteem, and gratitude, into a sincere and tender passion.

I spent a week at F * * * ; and left it laden with messages and commissions for M. Lafarge. Every one was desirous of making and receiving presents for the approaching new year. The gentlemen ordered pins; the ladies bracelets and dresses. M. Gabriel D * * *, resolving to unite the useful and the agreeable—at once to improve the heart, mind, and manners of his young wife,—sent for a complete copy of all Paul de Kock's novels!

There is a mania for commissions in the country; and the belief prevails that all who depart for the capital are the proper commissioners of their relations, friends, and acquaintance, to bring them up to the fashions of the day by the outlay of a few centimes. An old aunt wants the strongest and finest cambric-muslin at fifteen sous an ell,—it cannot be dearer, since her newspaper advertises calico at the same price; a female cousin is desirous of having a black Lyons silk dress of the finest

quality at two francs nineteen sous a yard ; while a young niece, who knows that bonnets are to be had at fifteen francs, wishes to have one at that price made by Mademoiselle Baudrand, whose style she has heard praised by the prefect's lady.

Previously to my return to Glandier, I stopped at Uzerche to intrigue for a few votes in favour of my uncle Pontier, who wished to be named member of the *conseil général* of his languishing department, and become its doctor, that he might prescribe for its moral diseases of overflow of stupidity and chronic barbarism. I could only console him under defeat, and save him from a patriotic desperation which would have impelled him heroically to destroy himself. I then proceeded to Vigemois, where M. and Madame Fleyniat detained me a day or two, to introduce me to the circle which constituted their little town the most elegant and animated in the department. Having been crammed with all the gossip of the place, I was shewn the lions ; but by an unlucky fatality, or a deplorable want of discernment, the "amiable" ladies all seemed to me eaten up with pretension, affectation, and silliness ;

while I was charmed by the kind and graceful hospitality extended to me by Madame Nauche, who won my interest by her lovely features and the chain of slanderous stories I had been told, to prejudice me against her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER this erratic life, I was delighted to return to my own quiet solitude, and enjoy the privilege of being merry without cause, or sad without having to give a reason. I would have employed myself in business, in the purchase of wood, and the regulation of the payments to be made and received by the house; but seeing that my mother-in-law had completely engrossed these duties, performing them mysteriously in secret conferences with M. Denis, I willingly resigned to her the more embarrassing and responsible part she had taken upon herself, and gave all my attention to the forges, which interested me, and which I understood.

I therefore spent several hours every day at the works, impelled by a two-fold motive. The foreman of the smelters, an intelligent

and trustworthy young man, who was strongly attached to me, was the professed admirer of my faithful Clementine, and appeared to please her sufficiently well to make me think of fusing them : I became the young artisan's confidante, and learned that, besides inexhaustible and burning love, he possessed fifteen thousand francs and a profitable trade. Clementine would have preferred in her husband a little more wit and breeding than fell to the lot of her worthy Limousin adorer ; in admiring his person, she lamented the Gothic cut of his coat. But upon my promising to polish him, she consented to reflect, and not repulse the love proffered by my protégé : and it was settled that in the spring Antonio should formally make his proposals ;—and that, with the aid of divine Providence, I should do my best to promote a wedding, and make two fond lovers happy.

The masons proceeded with their work under my directions ; and the miners, in levelling the terrace, alighted upon some old armour and remains of sculpture, which pleasingly initiated me into the joys of the antiquary.

In the fine weather I had Arabska saddled, and taught her new steps and curvets on the

turf in the meadow. When it was very fine, I took long rides in unknown directions, enjoying the pleasure, when we lost ourselves, of a laugh at the expense of my Parisian attendant's terror; for he heard no poetry in the howling of wolves at sundown, and preferred the high road to steep ravines untrodden by the foot of man or horse. This servant, the son of a former coachman of my father, was too careful of his neck to indulge the emotion of conquering an almost insurmountable difficulty; and veiling his cowardice beneath his attachment to me, implored me not to expose my life in risking his, with an eloquence proportioned to the imminence of the danger.

After a few hours spent in company with Madame Lafarge, I seated myself in the evening at my piano. Sometimes I sang in merry mood the satirical arias of the "Barber of Seville;" and at others wept through "Norma" or Mozart's "Requiem," or the musical throes of Schubert; or with the "Huguenots" and "Semiramis," I became excited, and practised enthusiastically till the wan and cheerless rays of a December sun entered the apartment.

I sent every day to Uzerche for the letters.

What pleasure equals the intimate exchange of thoughts, the reception of the ray of affection or love sent from afar to soothe in the heart the pangs of absence? In my opinion letters should be received as one would receive the absent writers—*tête-à-tête*, and comfortably seated by the fireside. Oh, the delight of a long look at the seal, previously to breaking it in haste; of the first kiss it tenders, and the last, which is ever the sweetest; of a deliberate reperusal of every word and sentence; of a careful consideration of what you are told, and, above all, of what you are not told, and what is perhaps intentionally suppressed; of participating joy, sorrow, or indignation; and of imprinting all into your soul, that you may live of the life that comes to mix with yours in defiance of time and space.

With these ideas, I was every morning tortured by my mother-in-law, who had ordered all letters to be delivered to her, bringing in mine, stationing herself before my bed, and, having first questioned me by her looks, watching me break each seal, reading in my eyes the contents of my letter, and then with a torrent of interrogations changing my pleasure

into a fit of anger which I could with difficulty conceal from its object. If I read my letter aloud, it produced angry remarks on the love expressed for me, and the neglect with which she was now treated. When, to flatter her maternal jealousy, I skipped the passages expressive only of attachment to me, she began crying, because secrets were kept from her knowledge, and complained of my having estranged from her her son's affection. When, to gratify her, I handed her my letter to peruse at pleasure, summoning M. and Madame Denis, the trio reckoned and discussed the kisses and expressions of tenderness sent me by my husband. Unable to bear this martyrdom, I desired my husband to include in each of his letters a detached page containing no loving messages or communications of importance, to be handed over to his mother; and he complied, to the despair of Madame Lafarge, who, receiving her page as the sole reply to all her questions, devoured the rest of the missive with her looks and bitter thoughts.

She attempted, after her son's departure, to extend her inquisition over all the rest of my correspondence. "Here is a letter for you

from Paris : who is it from ? It looks like a gentleman's writing. It is very bulky : are you pleased ? Perhaps it is from your sister ? Do the *women* in Paris correspond with gentlemen ?" To all these annoying queries I quietly replied, with indignant calmness, that coming from persons with whom she was unacquainted, the contents could not interest her ; that I corresponded with all my old friends, regardless of the very unimportant distinction of sex. Finally, having reperused my letter while my mother-in-law confronted me like a gigantic note of interrogation, I deliberately burned it, and so destroyed in her all hope of satisfying her suspicious curiosity. Madame Lafarge never forgave in me this frank reserve. She denounced it to M. Lafarge, as he himself informed me ; to her brother Raymond, who also defended me ; and afterwards to others, who, virtuously scandalised like herself at my conduct, found ample matter for all sorts of slander and calumny. How much happier should I have been to share with my mother-in-law in her pleasures and vexations, in my own sorrows and my joys ! How easy should it be

for a wife to study the love and duty she has sworn to the son in the heart of the mother, who is the guardian angel of the childhood which is past, as the wife should be the consoling angel of the man !

After the first days succeeding his arrival in Paris,—after the gracious words of welcome, promises, confidential communications, and professions of readiness to serve, so sincere in those first days,—M. Lafarge saw each of his friends return to his business, habits, and pleasures, and found himself deserted, alone, and disheartened. Society is merciless to those who seek in it supporters or protectors. It exacts from its votaries a boundless egotism,—necessary perhaps to follow its rapid whirl. It leaves not to the breathless victims in head and heart, which belong to it, the faculty of indulging thoughts or gaining friends ; while it must be conceded that the selfishness of those who seek equals that of hoped-for patrons. The man of one idea would with it petrify those of all to whom he makes application. He is displeased with the ruling powers for not concentrating their solicitude on his one

favoured notion, on which, according to him, depends the future prosperity and glory of the nation.

M. Lafarge intrigued against the age of gold to restore the age of iron. After having in vain preached to him patience, I counselled him to seek the way to his deputies', friends', and relatives' hearts through their appetites, and to put their good-will to the test by the truffles of Perigord. In obedience to his instructions, I wrote to all the persons of my acquaintance who could be of service to him, he telling me all it was necessary to explain and require. I frequently spent whole days in this disagreeable occupation. I knew not how to beg; and the part of solicitress, which it would have been impossible for me to play in person, was scarcely less revolting with a pen and paper. I tore one letter because it seemed too humble, another because it prayed too proudly, a third because the hand-writing was too aristocratically illegible; in short, if my productions wearied my husband's great friends, I was, in expiation, myself the first victim of my own dulness. The impossibility of obtaining Madame de Sabatié's dower, com-

pling my husband to have recourse for a loan to strangers, completed my distress. My cousin, believing that she lost the chance of a profitable investment, was inconsolable ; while I was not less afflicted for her, myself, for our realities, and our dreams.

In the midst of all this worry and irritation, I was often at a loss to understand M. Lafarge's conduct, and was miserable on finding him, with a view to his loan, resort to narrow thoughts and debasing actions. I had no objection to his making a thousand applications to the minister for a single favour ; but for his private business, and that business a loan, I shrank from the idea of seeing him basely cringe to one of our great kings of the bank. Bowing and flattery may be permissible perhaps to obtain an invitation to a ball from any of their greatnesses ; but in affairs of interest, in which confidence is indispensable, all applications should be based on honour, right, and high character ; and to bend the knee in order to borrow a little gold, is to give a man, with the license to despise, authority to superadd suspicion and refusal to his contempt of the borrower.

These ideas so bewildered my poor head, that no sophistry could calm my agitation. I felt with unspeakable anguish the moral obstacles that must incessantly oppose my wish to love and respect the man to whom I was united for life. I could only shut my eyes and pray, as I gradually comprehended the extent of the inferiority of the man whom fate had made my lord and master. My outraged soul fathomed in desperation the immensity of its irreparable misfortune, and struggled to retain an illusion which seemed about to disappear: it would have despoiled itself, that it might erect a pedestal to its master, to ennoble the worship which had been imposed upon it. In those moments of delusive pride I cried aloud, to stifle the voice of conviction, "This man is good—he is your superior; all about him is serious and useful, and agreeable to the usages of real life: he is your husband, and you love him. Not of him, but of the world and of the world's realities should you complain, for inflicting the first bitter pangs that attend the transition from your land of dreams and illusions to the duties and deceptions of actual life."

If I interrogate my conscience, it will bear witness for me, that it never tolerated these revolts of my mind, and that I ever courageously sought to stifle them in the enthusiasm of fidelity and duty. In sincerity of heart, I forced myself to find the tenderest expressions in addressing my absent husband; I commanded my thoughts to be gentle and affectionate; then I sent them to M. Lafarge in my letters, as an expiation of my involuntary wrongs. Whenever I succeeded in imbuing my correspondence with tenderness and esteem, I joyfully consigned my epistle to the post; when, on the contrary, I fancied my sorrow and discouragement had spoken out in despite of myself, I was wretched and despairing: and not unfrequently, in reperusing the expressions I had imposed upon my pen, overwhelmed with remorse at my well-intentioned hypocrisy, scalding tears would force their way, without, however, relieving my oppressed heart.

Madame Lafarge dwelt in her own room, almost constantly attended by M. Denis. I was entirely alone, and too happy to relieve my solitude by the presence of my charming cousin, Emma Pontier. This dear child had

just finished her education ; and her thoughts not being yet shut in by the materialism of existence, she sought with me friendship and a refuge for her illusions. Fortuneless, and well knowing that in the world her destiny would be to become the chief slave of some lord of the creation, her tender affections were elevated above this world. Like me, she had marked out a future for herself ; but while her heart was lost in the boundless immensity it embraced, mine languished in the chains that bound it to earth. The days we spent together were agreeably occupied. We walked among the ruins, read Chateaubriand, or I played to her on the piano. The effect of harmony was all-powerful over the tender and susceptible organisation of Emma. When the twilight came, and the darkness threw its large black veil over our vast saloon, I sung to her the romance of the “*Abencérage*,” or the “*Lac de Lamartine* ;” or sometimes one of the ballads of Schubert, in which spectres come forth from their coffins, and return to the earth to love, to pray, and to suffer. She would shudder, and lay her head on my shoulder to weep. Sometimes her emotion would

infect me : I became afraid to listen to myself, and we nestled close to each other, not daring to rise even to ask for the lamp, which was needed to restore our courage.

During our evenings, we loved to listen to the recital of the supernatural adventures which my mother-in-law told with so much mystery and credulity ; how it was the devil that stifled one of her children, and how an old monk roamed through one of the arcades of the grand corridor, chanting the psalms of *la pénitence*. One night a phantom had kissed her on the forehead, in order to forewarn her of the death of her husband, which happened two days afterwards. Another time, during one of the frosty and tempestuous nights of winter, she had seen light and plaintive ghosts come and extend their skeleton-hands before her hearth, regarding it with their vacant eyes, which were weeping icy tears.

One evening, pressing letters from M. Lafarge having required it, I sat up writing till two in the morning ; while Emma, who had not wished to go to bed before me, made Clementine shew her all the favourite dresses of my *corbeille*. Suddenly, my gentle little friend's

wishes induced me to put on once more my wedding-dress, my veil, my laces, and my white crown. I was becoming sad, and began to reckon in my heart all the illusions which had withered since I had deposited, on quitting the church, that virgin apparel, when the compliments of Emma, and the enthusiasm of Clementine, always in admiration before her mistress, turned my mind upon the vanity and the futile and superficial part of my remembrances. Wishing to continue our conversation longer, we had Emma's bed brought beside mine. All at once our lamp went out, and the flames of the chimney played in a thousand extravagant reflections on the angles of the furniture of the saloon. All the legends we had heard were recalled to our minds.

"I am afraid," said Emma, pressing my hand.

I also entertained a slight fear; but, assuming incredulity and strength, in order to calm her, I was desirous of proving to her how easily the marvellous may be always explained. I spoke to her of magnetism, of somnambulism, &c. Meanwhile the wind arose, and

moaned through the dilapidated corridors; the cries of the night-birds diminished my courage; and the howling of the wolves, which we heard in the distance, froze our hands, which clasped each other convulsively. The fire, which was nearly extinguished, no longer enlightened more than the angles of the piano, which looked like an immense coffin. Emma shuddered, and her teeth chattered. I was a little stronger, but my heart was shaken with presentiments. My poor little cousin, unable any longer to reason with her fears, came to seek refuge with me, and with our two heads hidden under my counterpane, we awaited the morning in trembling silence. At length, when the first streaks of day were announced by the bell of the *angelus*, our heads issued from their white prison—our eyes, still affrighted, met, and we exchanged a long burst of laughter at the remembrance of our mortal terrors.

Next day, at breakfast, we related to my mother-in-law all that our imaginations had seen and heard in that gloomy night. In order to embellish our narrative, we would fain have

vaunted of the visit of some phantom-monk ; but the deception seemed a little too gross, and we were both scrupulous of adding another superstition to the many which already disturbed the solitude of poor Glandier.

CHAPTER XIX.

MADAME LAFARGE, meanwhile, jealous of the excessive tenderness exhibited towards me by Emma, sought to employ a thousand means to detach her from my heart. She told her of the letter of the fifteenth of August, and the sad scenes of my arrival, metamorphosing into reality the love that I had alleged for a *young man*. She told her I had seen him at Pompadour, and afterwards at Glandier; and made, in short, so pleasant a *mélange* of absurdities and black calumnies, that I saw a cloud on the affection of my cousin; to whom I gave all my confidence, for the purpose of justifying myself. The latter saw immediately that she might continue to love me; and she did love me the better for what I had suffered, and for what I sometimes still suffered.

My uncle Pontier came often to see me, and testified his pleasure at the friendship I dis-

played towards his daughter; but to his sweet, amiable, enthusiastic conversations there had succeeded in him a preoccupation, a discouragement, a sadness—profound, ardent, and continuous—which afflicted and affrighted me. One evening he appeared more unhappy than usual. He made me sing all the airs that he loved, spoke to me of absence, of the absent, of the sacredness of remembrances; then, after having embraced me, he took leave, recommending to me his children; and the next day I learnt that he had departed for Algiers. I wept bitterly for that only man who had understood, loved, and adopted me in my new family; and I wrote to him, pledging myself to love and protect his children, and telling him all the thoughts, all the regrets, which I would preserve towards him until his return.

I was sometimes visited by M. de T * * *, with whom I was pleased to be able to exchange a few ideas. I gained instruction from his good taste and experience, to assist me in forming the plantations which I contemplated for the spring; and I made him write in my album the pretty verses which he was accustomed to make, in order to abridge the tedi-

ousness of the ride from St. Martin to Glandier. I had formed the project of going to pass a couple of days at his château, and to make an ample acquaintance with Madame de T * * *. A period of execrable weather, and the famished rats which had *improvised* a dinner from the buttons of my *Amazon*, caused me to put off, and subsequently to abandon, that prospect of reunion, of which I had need to enable me to dispel a thousand wearisome pre-occupations.

I received from M. Lafarge letters of despair. The business relating to his patent was going forward very slowly, though promising certain success; but the loan, which proceeded more slowly still, offered difficulties which he feared would be insurmountable. The pompous speculations, which several years before had ruined so many fortunes, had rendered the bankers distrustful and intractable. As it was difficult for them to obtain certain information concerning the value of Glandier, on the soundness of the mortgages of which they wished to secure their advances, they had all refused after more or less excuses. I sent an unlimited power of attorney to endeavour to sell

Villers-Hellon, or to raise a loan upon my dower. I preached patience and courage to M. Lafarge, and endeavoured to put tender and affectionate words into my letters, in order that at night they might lull to sleep the deceits and fatigues of the day.

He had passionately desired my portrait. Before his departure, he had wished to have it taken; but time had failed him, and he had not known where to find a young girl, who had been recommended to him as having passable talent. Desirous of realising the wish of the poor absentee, and to soothe the discouragement and impatience which daily gained upon him, I sallied forth in search of the fair Limousine. She was a young old maid, who appeared very sanctified, and whose words were somewhat sticky with the honey of flattery; but she was well informed, unfortunate, and had, in place of genius, a box of colours and brushes, assurance, and the style of a sign-board painter. She kept me sitting for three weeks in order to bring forth from a large blue sky a benevolent red and white physiognomy, which, having like me a mouth, a nose, two eyes, and dark hair, of course ought to resemble me in the most strik-

ing manner ;—and was also not unlike one of those great chubby figures, which issue from a horn of abundance, and smile, from over the doors of pastry-cooks' shops, at the little children of the Rue St. Denis.

Madame Lafarge was so enthusiastic at sight of my portrait, and Mademoiselle Brun regarded it, near and at distance, with a smile of such proud satisfaction, that I believed with a sigh that my vanity had deluded me, and that I was quite as ugly as my picture. I wished, nevertheless, to hazard a slight remark to Mademoiselle Brun on the ideality of the tints of lilies and roses which she had flatteringly substituted for the tolerably yellow verity of my complexion ; but our artist made me observe that a sprightly rose suited much better than a pale tint with a blue sky ; and Madame Lafarge felt assured that her son would be doubly pleased on seeing his wife so full of health, freshness, and *embonpoint*. I was silenced, and it was agreed that the *chef-d'œuvre* should not be retouched.

At the moment of his departure for Paris, I had requested M. Lafarge to send me a little cake from the shop of the celebrated Felix ; not

that I indulged myself in any allusion concerning the state of staleness and dryness in which it must arrive, but delighting myself in idea with a fête which I was desirous of offering to my recollections of gourmandising and of youth.

Formerly my cousins and I were accustomed to appoint as a rendezvous the Passage des Panoramas, where we might shake each other's hand, and exchange our little secrets of the evening before, while our governesses, forgetful of us, were enjoying the cakes of the renowned pastry-cook.

M. Lafarge had appeared to comprehend my desire. I wished to remind him of it, and to afford him a similar pleasure to that which he was to procure for me, by adding to the parcel containing my portrait, some little cakes and chestnuts of his dear Limousin. It was agreed that Madame Lafarge, whose reputation for pastry was colossal, and who was not accustomed to concede to any one the grand work of making side-dishes, should take charge of the confection of the cakes, and that on the day when M. Lafarge would receive them at Paris, she should make some others to be eaten by our colony. That second part of the pro-

ject, which was entirely my own, seemed to me charming, original, and I had the pleasure of a child in thinking of a supper of which the partakers, separated by a hundred leagues, should thus become again united in thought and in heart. Knowing that my sister would be at Paris, I desired M. Lafarge to invite her to our reunion; I even invited Madame Buffière to that little fête; but she answered me, that being with child, she could not undertake the journey, yet promised to make at Faye a third portion of that reminiscent tea-party.

At Glandier the evening was exceedingly gay. We devoted music, conversation, and our thoughts, to the honour of the absent. I had made all the workmen and domestics of the house partake of our fête; and while in the saloon we took a cup of tea to the welfare and return of M. Lafarge, at the office uproarious toasts were drunk to his health and to the success of his patent.

M. Lafarge was enchanted with my attention in sending him my portrait. He found it sufficiently ugly to recompense my self-love for its abnegation, and so delighted with it that my patience was amply repaid, by the long words

of affection and gratitude, for the long hours of weariness which it had been necessary for me to endure to have it taken. My kindly little idea of the supper had been unsuccessful. My husband told me, that on the evening of the arrival of the packet, being obliged to pass part of the night from home, he could not eat more than a mouthful of the cakes; that he had returned suffering much from pains in the stomach; and that he was put to bed with frightful headache and vomiting. This intelligence disquieted me for an entire day without reason; as I learnt on the next that a few cups of lemonade had calmed that slight indisposition, which had been much less violent than those which had so often alarmed me at Glandier.

After having finished my portrait, Mademoiselle Brun afforded me a surprise by commencing that of my niece. It was a very long affair, and exhibited an amiable attention; so I invited her to remain with me till I should be able to take her to the house of Madame Buffière, whose portrait she was also to paint, and with whom I was to pass a fortnight after the return of M. Lafarge.

Mademoiselle Brun seemed unhappy. Her

family was nearly indigent—she had no friends; she recalled these circumstances incessantly; and I offered to her, from pure kindness, my hospitality and interest. In other respects she did not in the least disturb the busy solitude of my days, seldom quitting the chamber of my mother-in-law, who overwhelmed her with flatteries, friendship, pancakes, and strong coffee. I was astonished at the impassioned affection which Madame Lafarge had inspired in Mademoiselle Brun, when I learned that she wished her to marry an old gentleman, rich, and a widower, whose name I forget, but who resided at Excidenil, not far from Faye. My sister-in-law had a half-share in the plot, into which I was in nowise initiated.

About that period, there occurred to me a very painful scene with Madame Lafarge. She had undertaken to procure the legalisation of an act indispensable to her son for his loan. I know not by what chance, when she sent it to me for signature, I had the curiosity to read the document, and I could not express all that I experienced of torment, grief, and indignation, on finding that, instead of the power of attorney, I was reading a will, written in my

name, and which went to alter all my wishes and all my sentiments. It was impossible for me to doubt. My mother-in-law had violated the will which I had placed under the safeguard of her honour; she had submitted my most secret thoughts to a man of law; had charged him to legalise wishes which were not mine; had sought to pass my fortune into the hands of her daughter's children, of strangers, desirous that not one of the thoughts and affections of my heart should survive me, and that all those whom I had loved should doubly weep me, in believing that I had been chilled by forgetfulness before being iced by death. It was an infamy. After having speculated upon my marriage, was it still necessary to speculate on my death? A terrible idea passed through my soul. In the same bed in which I nightly reposed, another wife, young, confiding, and isolated, like me, from all her friends, had come to her death, having signed a will which despoiled her family. Had she, too, been dealt falsely with? had she been a victim?

“My God, my God, have pity!” I cried, throwing myself on my knees. At that mo-

ment, my mother-in-law, who had ascertained her blunder, and had hoped that I had sent back the paper without reading it, entered my chamber.

“I know all,” I said to her, in a voice which trembled with emotion and despair. “I know that you have violated all that is most sacred—the secrets of death. I know that you have wished to plunder my sister—that you have sought to make me give the lie to my affections and to my heart in that awful moment when we depart from life. Providence has disclosed to me your snares; they will be henceforth useless. Yes, I will make a will—I will send it to my sister—I will give her this time all that it is possible for me to give her; and if I am soon to die, my faithful Clementine shall not quit my pillow, but shall preserve my last agony from violence and craft.”

“Marie, Marie !” exclaimed Madame Lafarge ; “I implore you not to disinherit Charles. He knows nothing of my attempt.”

“I will believe so—I have need to believe it; but my resolution is not the less unalterable.”

“Marie, I entreat you, forget it all. Speak

not of it to my son : he will never forgive me, though it is for his interest I have done it."

"It will be impossible for me to forget ; but I promise you that I will not speak of it to your son. You ought not to blush before him, Madame. Not forgetfulness, but silence and forgiveness."

"But if you have a child, will you dispossess that for your sister?"

"A child? Oh, if God should bestow upon me that treasure, can you believe that all my fortune, my whole existence, my sole solicitude, all that is me or mine, will not be devoted to it?"

"Well, Marie, you have been unjust ; for I have forged that other instrument but under the persuasion that you will have that child."

"It is impossible."

"I, however, am convinced of it ; I know it."

"But I have been told that certain symptoms are requisite, which I have not."

"Those symptoms prove nothing for a first conception. Your eyes are sunken ; you are sick at heart, have an invincible repugnance for some kinds of food, and your figure is

less slender and less flexible. I tell you from my olden experience that you are with child.”

I was confounded at that revelation of Madame Lafarge: I was unable to believe her, yet dared not interrogate her farther. My inexperience was immense, absurd: I racked my poor head to no purpose. At length, after exciting myself and stupifying my imagination for several days—after having heard it repeated in my ears a thousand times that I was already greatly changed, and very ostensibly enlarged in size,—I believed in a miracle, and entertained the hope of being promoted to the dignity of a mother by the grace of God.

My tears were dried up by that sweet hope. I asked a thousand questions, and opposed a thousand arguments against the convictions of my mother-in-law. I had need that she should reply to the former with her matronly experience, while she victoriously combated the latter. My hopes of having a *little girl* already so fully occupied my heart, that it chased thence all rancour.

I did not dare to speak of my happiness to M. Lafarge. It seemed to me that I might

lose my bliss in believing it : I became incredulous for the purpose of being convinced of a deception, and made vows to all the saints that they might change the impossible into the possible. All my thoughts, all my actions, were already concentrated on that dear little addition to myself. I no longer mounted on horseback, no longer wore stays ; I caused all my dresses to be enlarged, in order that my waist might expand without impediment, and I already occupied myself in making baby-linen with Clementine, and arranged for my infant's education with Mademoiselle Brun. I would not sing, nor even read, except romances and works which spoke of little children : I had a foretaste of the terrestrial paradise. My little *Jacqueline* was so pretty : I dreamed that she was so fair, so rosy. She had black hair, blue eyes, the mouth of the little king of Rome, as much of heart as the angels, and an infinitude of kisses to answer to mine.

Beautiful little Jacqueline, born of my dreams, never to come upon this earth, do not seek for life from another mother ! Remain in heaven, dear child, that I may regain you there ! Be one day the recompense of all the agonies

which it has been my lot to bear in passing through the world !

This settled idea, which recurred to me day and night, was for me a blessing. I had during the same time a thousand imperceptible vexations, which harassed my life with their petty wounds ; and I required to have love in my heart to make me forget them awhile.

M. Lafarge seemed to grow more and more disheartened. He was seized with the *mal du pays*. He had tried all the bankers of Paris without realising his loan, and said he was wearied and suffering; he feared that he should fall sick at a distance from us. The forge did not prosper; the labourers came to complain to me of the incapacity of Denis, who allowed the charcoal to fail. I sent around us to all the woods where it was sold, without being able to purchase any for our consumption. MM. Buffière and Maynaud, who had promised M. Lafarge to superintend his business, scarcely ever set foot at Glandier; and at last Denis had sent away the chief clerk. Feeling himself supported by my mother-in-law, he ordered all things as master; was impertinent towards my domestics, and imperious with the

workmen out of doors. He even went so far as to send away my masons, and the labourers who were employed upon my garden. He moreover drank, passed his time in mysterious journeys, killing with fatigue all the horses in the stables, of which he accused my servants, and had even the hardihood to write that calumny to Paris. When I received the letter of M. Lafarge, which told me of that accusation, I sent for Denis, and gave him to understand that I would not suffer spies around me, and that at the first false report I heard again, I should desire his master to dismiss him. He excused himself, and sought to throw the calumny upon M. Buffière, with a base and false humility which changed my anger into contempt.

I could have wished to tell M. Lafarge every thing concerning the selfishness of his brother-in-law, the impertinences and disorders of Denis; but fearing to add my annoyances to his, I forbore; urged his return with all my prayers and desires, and, though counting the days, endured in silence. All these vexations irritated my nerves, and made me timid. In the night I was afraid, and had the

foreman of the labourers and my own domestic to sleep at my door, while Clementine never quitted my chamber.

The diamonds of Madame de Léautaud had considerable effect in making me afraid of robbers. Having been a long time without intelligence of Marie, I was fearful that the state of her health had obliged her to follow the advice of her physician, who, in the spring, had threatened to send her to winter at Pau, far from the frosts and fatigues of the world. I had written to her at the moment of M. Lafarge's departure for Paris, to request of her to point out what ought to be my conduct ; to tell her that my husband knew her secret, that he was at her disposition, with a devotion as absolute, as discreet, as mine, either to return or sell her diamonds in concert with her. Not having yet received her answer, which was to decide my irresolution, I attributed her silence to absence. I then desired M. Lafarge, who was to be introduced to Madame de Montbreton, to learn if Madame de Léautaud was at Paris. My husband was some time before he could relieve my uncertainty, Madame de Montbreton not having left Corcy till the end of

December, and M. Lafarge consequently not having been able to see her until then.

M. Lafarge informed me that Madame de Léautaud was at Paris; and he requested me to propose to my friend, in case she should not immediately require the full value of the diamonds, to allow the surplus to remain in our hands at ten per cent interest. He told me that whatever sum it might be, it would be to him of great service, to enable him to purchase at the moment some wood which the managers of the Pompadour stables, I believe, were going to sell for cash in our neighbourhood. I confess that it was painful to me to become the interpreter of this request to Marie; nevertheless, I did as he desired. Having given all the trouble of that matter to M. Lafarge, I was unable to refuse making, in his name, a proposition which might be so easily rejected, if it were inconvenient or disagreeable to Madame de Léautaud. That unfortunate little box of diamonds, confided to my care, and in a castle without gates, oppressed me horribly. I was only reassured by the impossibility that it could be stolen or sold without discovery. Fortunately they were not entirely dismounted, and I

knew from Madame de Léautaud that their description had been given, by the chief of the police, to all the jewellers of Paris, and that M. de Léautaud had taken all the steps which were necessary on that subject.

CHAPTER XX.

THE 1st of January was approaching, and I did not expect M. Lafarge for three weeks. I was deeply afflicted, for all was growing worse and worse around me. The absences of Denis became every day more frequent. He passed every night in mysterious rides. Our workmen threatened to engage with the proprietor of some forges—our neighbour and rival. In fact, not only did M. Buffière not assist us with his presence or advice, but, notwithstanding the express injunctions of his brother-in-law to the contrary, he had made a trial, at his own house, of the new method of fabrication, which had obtained complete success.

M. Buffière, and, above all, his partner Magnaud, spoke with feelings of envy, far from fraternal, of our future wealth, and took it very ill that I should exhibit my astonishment on

learning that, contrary to the desire of M. Lafarge, he had made trial of our discoveries, and thus deprived my husband of the first enjoyment of a success which he had paid for so dearly during the last six weeks. This information, which I could not avoid communicating to my husband, and a loan of twenty-five thousand francs which my agent had procured for him, for the 31st of December, hastened his return. I received a letter which, in promising me his presence, and my new-year's gifts for the 3d of January, delighted me, and relieved my heart from the presentiment of evil which had for a long time oppressed it.

Though he had been successful in his demand for the patent, M. Lafarge seemed to me very sad. He spoke of the griefs of his absence, without alluding to the pleasures of his return. A sentence of his letter ran thus : "I shall arrive early in the morning ; I wish to see you the first, alone, even without my mother—contrive that it may be so." That sentence having been read by Madame Lafarge, who, in her eagerness to learn the news, had opened the letter during my walk to the forge, she was indignant, and made me understand, by her

bitter words, that she considered me capable of desiring to monopolise the mind of her son, and to withdraw from her his affections ; to which, however, she would not submit, but would rather sit up the whole night, in order to see him before I did.

It was under these agreeable circumstances that I commenced the year. For the first time in my life, new-year's day came to me without the kisses or good wishes of those I loved ; and when I bent my knees to pray, I shed tears of bitterness, which could only be assuaged by the thoughts of that dear little child, of which I dreamed as a hope and as a blessing. Clementine first, and then our domestics and the labourers, came to wish me a happy year. I had prepared for each a little present ; and I presented to myself a new-year's gift in the joy of putting a smile on the lips of all around me. Grief, which increases at the sound of joys that have become to it as strangers, is consoled and forgets itself at the sight of those same joys when they are the work of its solicitude, and we become almost happy in giving happiness to others.

Madame Fleyniat came to pass the first days

of the year at Glandier, and brought to me her little girl, a charming child, greatly spoiled, very pretty, and exceedingly mischievous, who loved me much, and told me so in a *petite* style, which was quite original.

In his last letter, M. Lafarge had informed me that he had not yet obtained the money from M. Legris, on the receipt of which his return depended; and he despaired of being with me so early as he desired. It was, therefore, a perfect surprise to me when I was awakened by him on the morning of the 3d. When I saw him smile and shed tears in kissing me on his return, I was frightened at the change in him. Clementine, whose bed was near mine, also asked him immediately if he was ill. He told us that his stomach pained him; that during the latter portion of his stay at Paris he had been obliged to be on horse-back day and night; that he had constantly, when travelling, a sickness of heart and stomach, and had taken nothing till he reached Limousin, when a little broth had caused him to vomit violently. I wished to prepare for him a cup of tea, but he refused.

After having expressed to my husband my

joy at seeing him again, I put a thousand questions to him concerning his business, my family, his health, and my friends. He told me that he had brought back the patent ; procured a loan from the firm of Martin, Didier, and Delamarre ; that he had for me a mass of presents, letters, and affections ; and a delicious pin, in gold and turquoise, from Madame de Montbreton, who had been charmed with him. In the letter which she had sent for me, through M. Lafarge, Madame de Montbreton told me, after many protestations of intimate friendship, that she had sent me an ivy branch, bearing the motto, “ I die where I attach myself.”

In the midst of all these inquiries and answers, M. Lafarge appeared sad and abstracted. I remarked this to him, and asked him, laughing, if he had left his heart at Paris. Instead of answering me, he asked me, sharply, who it was that had posted letters at Uzerche, addressed to Count Ch * * *.

“ I know not,” I replied ; “ I can only tell you that it was not I.”

“ If you have written to him, I entreat you not to conceal it from me.”

“ If I had wished to maintain a second af-

fection and a blamable correspondence, should I have confided my secret to you? should I have told you even the name of him I had loved, and wished to forget on becoming your wife?"

"You are right; but still I am assured of it."

"That I have written to M. Ch * * *?"

"Nearly so."

"Then it is an infamous calumny, or a singular coincidence. I require that you will investigate the subject. If you unjustly suspect me, I cannot place in you a friendly confidence. You may watch over my conduct—you may interrogate me concerning my actions; but I will permit no one to establish a system of espionage and accusation between us."

"You well know that I love you more than I love them. I believe you; but confess that M. de T * * * has paid his court to you during my absence."

"He has addressed verses to me, and some compliments; nothing more."

"But you have written to him?"

"Yes; you know that I wished to effect a marriage between one of my cousins and one

of his friends. I wrote to him every time that a letter from my aunt rendered it necessary for me to obtain further information, or brought me a new answer."

"But in Limousin the women never write."

"I am not a Limousine : and could you never have loved me without that essential qualification?"

"But it may probably be converted into slander."

"What matter? And if you are above those petty provincialisms, I thank heaven, and despise what others may say."

Altogether our conversation, which continued for two hours on these distrusts, rumours, and suspicions, fully acquainted me with the nature of the letters which had been written against me during those two months of absence, with the torments and trials which were reserved for me in the time to come. Nevertheless, I was still beloved by M. Lafarge. A word, a look, easily destroyed the scaffolding of calumnies raised with such exceeding cost against me ; and I did not despair of overcoming both the hatred and wickedness of which I was the object.

During the interchange of thoughts, explanations, and apologies, which succeeded to the suspicions of M. Lafarge, my mother-in-law came three or four times to knock at the door ; but it was locked, and we did not answer. I afterwards learned that Madame Lafarge, who had watched for her son all the morning, was indignant at learning that he had crossed the river, come over the wall of the enclosure through a breach, and entered my chamber without passing through the avenue, and thus without being perceived by her. I understood now that he had required to see me alone in order to tell me his griefs and suspicions. I was affected, was grateful for that frank explanation ; I triumphed in my self-love ; and it was not till about noon that I reminded him of the propriety of going to embrace his mother. He returned a few minutes afterwards, so fatigued that he desired to go to bed, and wished me to concede to him my chamber, inasmuch as I could there watch near him more conveniently, and could play to him the airs which he had not heard so long.

Scarcely was M. Lafarge installed in my apartment, when he was seized with vomiting.

His uncle, M. Fleyniat, somewhat of a doctor, attributed his sickness to the journey, and ordered him some orangeade. I made him a cupful; and he felt much better after taking it.

I passed all that day beside the bed of the poor traveller, who shewed us the famous patent, and received the enthusiastic felicitations of all of us with great joy. He wished me not to quit his pillow; overwhelmed me with tender words, saying that he had brought me his success for a new-year's gift; that I had inspired his fine and valuable discovery; and that all the new iron should be marked with the cipher of Marie; and then he covered my hand with a thousand kisses of gratitude.

I had caused to be engraven at Paris a stamp in *malachite*, bearing the forge-hammers, and a motto of my invention. It was our arms of *noblesse industrielle*. That mark of attention enchanted M. Lafarge. He exhibited it to his mother and to his uncle, repeating to them,

“ See how she has shewn her love for me! How good she is! How her thoughts were with me during my absence!”

Madame Lafarge assumed a grumbling, discontented air, and seemed greatly annoyed at

the pleasure for which her son rendered me so many thanks.

After the departure of our neighbours, M. Lafarge, remaining alone with me, interrogated me concerning the others, and the occurrences which had taken place during his absence. I told him all my torments and griefs; I told him of the negligent desertion of his brother-in-law, the impertinences and inattention of Denis, the dissatisfaction of the workmen, and the want of charcoal which had compelled them to shut up the forge. He appeared highly mortified and painfully abstracted, telling me that the labourer, Joseph Astier, had also complained to him on his arrival; but that he would restore good order, in place of all these abuses of authority and confidence.

Not wishing to allow me to descend to dinner, M. Lafarge entreated his mother to let it be served for me at his bedside. He seemed anxious to make reparation for the days lost amid the sorrows of his absence. They brought me the wing of a truffled fowl: my husband wished to taste a small truffle, which I held to him on the end of my fork. Unfortunately that was a slight imprudence, which made

him more sick, and towards ten o'clock he had several vomitings.

The night was calmer. The next day our invalid suffered only from excessive weakness. M. Denis wished to speak with him : he sent him away two or three times, entreating us to leave him that day to repose, and to prevent any one from speaking to him of business. He merely directed his confidential labourer to go to Uzerche, to seek a portmanteau containing money, and to cause his luggage to be forwarded.

At the hour of luncheon some biscuits were served in the saloon, when I found myself with Mademoiselle Brun beside my husband. It was necessary therefore to share our little repast; and he wished for a spoonful of perfumed whipped cream.

M. Buffière arrived in the meantime. He was closeted a long time with his brother-in-law ; and that interview appeared to have horribly fatigued and depressed M. Lafarge. At five o'clock, the vomitings returned with greater violence and frequency than on the preceding day. I wished to send in search of the physician of Brives ; but this my mother-in-law

opposed, and made choice of M. Bardon, whom I knew for a very good friend and a very bad doctor.

Meanwhile the complaints of M. Lafarge began to disquiet me; and if M. Buffière reassured me in some measure, by saying that it was merely a simple indisposition, and that his brother-in-law was in the habit of exaggerating the slightest suffering, Madame Lafarge had sinister ideas, which chilled the blood in my veins. She feared that her son had been poisoned at Paris by his enemies. She related to me the death of her husband, who, dining at the house of M. N * * *, had been poisoned by a rival in a piece of almond-cake, and had exhibited the same symptoms as those of our sufferer.

At two in the morning M. Bardon arrived. I took him aside, and told him my disquietudes, and the frightful suspicions of my mother-in-law. He laughed heartily at these chimerical fears; assured me that there was not a symptom which might give consistency to those formidable ideas; that the real complaints of M. Lafarge were spasms of the heart, and inflammation of the stomach; that the affection which had

caused the death of his father had been natural, as he had attended him himself; and that the bewildered imagination of Madame Lafarge alone could suspect such a crime. I made him explain to me the proper treatment to combat these sad spasms, wishing to have it scrupulously followed. It was ordered that leeches should be applied; that the invalid should be interdicted from cold drinks; and that emollient soothing syrups should be mixed in his barley-water.

I afterwards talked for a long time with M. Bardon of the early education of children; of the “*Emile*” of Rousseau, which he had lent me some days before, and which had awakened in my heart a thousand new feelings, at once deep and powerful.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILE we were thus passing the night in conversation, the rats held their nocturnal revels over our heads, awaked M. Lafarge from his light slumber, and rendered him very impatient. M. Bardon inquired if I had not endeavoured to get rid of those noisy and destructive guests. I told him that I had already made a mixture of *ratsbane*, flour, and water, for them, without its having produced any exterminating result. He advised me to add to the flour and poison some sugar and butter, promised even to send me some maize-flour; and knowing that I had no more *ratsbane*, he gave me a small note to enable me to procure some arsenic at Uzerche.

The chagrin of finding himself chained to his bed, when a thousand important occupa-

tions claimed his attention, augmented the sufferings of M. Lafarge. He was impatient, depressed, gloomy. He avoided, with a sort of terror, any tête-à-tête with his mother and his brother-in-law, who spoke to him constantly of business. He seemed pleased while I lulled him, in words of affection, with the dreams and projects to come. He was so exceedingly ill, that I alone had the right of not being dismissed into very satanic company every time it was necessary to make him take the medicine prescribed by his doctor. His mother, above all, had the misfortune of rendering him impatient; and he would only leave to her the care of preparing a multitude of barley-waters, potions, and cataplasms, and of inspecting before her fire a regiment of coffee-pots, the contents of which he despised, notwithstanding the directions given, and our entreaties.

The attentions of Mademoiselle Brun seemed agreeable and useful to the invalid. I asked her therefore to delay her departure for Faye a few days. She consented most readily, and I was grateful; for it was consenting to associate herself with our fatigues, with our sick-

bed inquietudes, with the pre-occupation of our days, and the restlessness of our nights.

All my conversations with my husband discovered to me the jealousy and calumnious disposition of his mother. Not only did they dare to misconstrue my actions, but to attribute some to me which were entirely false: to the numerous anxieties of M. Lafarge's business, they had added doubt, suspicion, and uncertainty insupportable for the mind and cruel to the heart.

Consequently, in finding me innocent of their odious imputations, more confiding than before, more loving, because he suffered, and quite happy at seeing him again, M. Lafarge shewed deep joy. He said to me, "I entreat you to shew your love for me in their presence; let them hear your pleasant words, and witness your kind attentions." And he repeated to his mother, "See how good she is—how she loves me—how happy I am. You must therefore love her. Embrace her, to thank her for the happiness she has conferred on me."

At other times, a jealous suspicion passed across his brow; he interrogated me with a

short, hard, distrustful voice ; then he begged pardon ; he saw that I was wounded, and humiliated himself, relating, in his excuse, all their treacherous insinuations.

I would have remained ignorant of that malevolence which concealed itself in darkness to calumniate me. It needed all my husband's sufferings to restrain the violence of my indignation, to defer an explanation, and make me preserve a silence which almost stifled me, and appeared to me as cowardly as degrading.

When I approached my mother-in-law, I involuntarily recoiled ; her honeyed and false words made my heart revolt ; my brow burnt and quivered when her lips touched it.

I own I triumphed ungenerously at her son's exclusive preference for me. I joyed to mark his eyes seeking me, while he answered with indifference to the questions of his mother, who had driven me from the chamber. I enjoyed the words of love he lavished on me before her ; the readiness with which he took the drink from my hands, when he had refused it from hers. I shewed her my power ; I shewed her the price of those kisses which I

had denied to jealousy, but granted to penitence.

Fool that I was ! I staked my life against a jest. Strong in my conscience and his love, I myself evoked the hatred which was to dig my tomb.

At his second visit, M. Bardon found the inflammation in the throat more intense ; M. Lafarge had great difficulty in swallowing, swelling of the glands, and a violent determination of blood to the head. He applied leeches, bled him slightly, and injected a little alum into the throat. This occasioned excruciating pain to the patient, which was followed by a burning, sharp, continuous taste in the mouth.

M. Bardon having left the chamber, M. Lafarge told me he was sure that they had made him swallow vitriol by mistake ; that he felt a fierce and insupportable inward fire ; that M. Bardon kept a bad and disorderly dispensatory, out of which he served his patients ; and that he had deceived himself.

I in vain tried to soothe his pain by some garglings with cold water ; and then, greatly troubled with his inquietude, I sought the doc-

tor, and frankly told him all his friend's fears. He re-assured me, by telling me that the alum had been given him by his brother-in-law, who was also a physician like himself, and with whom he had passed the day. He also told me it was very easy to distinguish it, by certain properties, from the other corrosive substances of which we were afraid. He could not, however, easily convince his patient, in whose mind the fear of poison had become a fixed idea; nor Madame Lafarge, who habitually changed the most simple misfortunes into the darkest crimes.

Madame Panzani came to give us the benefit of her care, her receipts, her balms, and her cordials. Her love for her nephew shewed itself in a multitude of words, which fatigued him fearfully; by a mania for changes and experiments against which he revolted, and which made him consign his *blue-stockings* nurse to a great distance—sometimes even as far as the devil.

The day brought little amelioration to the state of the poor sufferer. Scarcely had some hours' repose brought back hope, and a smile to our lips, when a new crisis plunged us into despair. The vomiting was less frequent, the

spasms more violent. One night they were so prolonged, that Mademoiselle Brun and myself, who watched near him, could scarcely prevent him from opening his veins with a razor; and we were obliged to cover him with cold water, and expose him to the frosty air of a January night; in short, to forget the treatment of his disease, that we might soothe the horrible convulsions which tortured him.

Every morning M. Bardon gave us encouragement—that is to say, myself and my mother-in-law; for all the rest of the family united in telling us, that this state, with its complaints and agonies, were natural to M. Lafarge's temperament; and that they invariably followed his commercial occupations and fatigue.

It must be confessed, that if the patient got no better, he acted precisely contrary to all that was prescribed for him. The doctor recommended perfect silence, and the frequent use of soothing drinks. Jests and chattering resounded incessantly at M. Lafarge's bed-side, and he would drink nothing but cold water; and burst into furious passions when an attempt was made to mingle a little gum or linseed with his dangerous but chosen drink.

The task of encountering the storm was generally mine. In turn with success or failure I employed the words of love, deceit, or determination, and kept for the most important prescriptions the great persuader of a brief exile into the neighbouring chamber.

I had installed my husband in my own apartment, which was warmer and larger than his own, and I took my hours of sleep in that of Mademoiselle Brun, sharing it with her. This arrangement was excessively inconvenient for me. Fatigued with watching, pains in the stomach, and a severe cold in the chest, the few hours I spent in bed, with the hope of repose, were broken in upon by a continual passing between my mother-in-law's room and that of her son. I was, so to speak, in a corridor, through which Madame Lafarge passed fifty times in a minute, sometimes with cordials she had made on her own fire, and which generally returned thither after a refusal; sometimes leaving the sick man's bed to answer the numberless messages which came from Faye, to Messieurs Denis, Buffière, and Magnaud, who had taken up their dwelling by his hearth.

These continual goings and comings were a

torture to the invalid. He endured with impatience these questions, so detestable when the answer is discouraging and invariable; these steps, so heavily light, waking him with so tender precaution as to leave him no right to complain.

Tuesday night had passed well, Wednesday much better; I was more tranquil, and listened to the equal breathing of M. Lafarge, who went to sleep with his head on my shoulder, while I murmured pleasant and affectionate words of hope and the future in his ear; when, suddenly he was roused by Madame Buffière, who rushed like a mad woman into the chamber, kissed his hands, and sobbed, crying, “My Charles, you are about to die. Ah! unhappy being, what can become of me? what will be life without thee? Oh! my brother, thy Aména will follow thee to the tomb!”

“Aména, calm yourself; you make me ill; I am better,” said M. Lafarge.

“Ah,” continued Madame Buffière, “my poor Charles to die so young! I am come to render you the last cares—I am come at the risk of killing my child; you shall die in my arms.”

“My God ! must I then die ? And you have concealed it from me—and you cared not for it ?” said the poor sick man, looking at me sadly and reproachfully.

“I swear that there is no danger in your condition,” I answered, being really stupified and indignant at this dangerous scene. “I do not understand your sister’s conduct ; with such love as this they will kill you indeed. I must beg you, Aména, to leave him.”

“No, no ; I will not quit him again !”

It was no longer possible for me to preserve my coolness. I turned angrily to M. Buffière, a cold spectator of all that passed, and told him I required that he should remove his wife from the chamber, and that he should prevent her re-entering it until she had become more calm and prudent.

This was a difficult measure to execute ; but at last Madame Buffière was dragged out by force ; crying, that I wished to engross her brother, and ravish from her his last sigh. Her rage and grief produced a frightful nervous attack.

The impression produced by this sad scene

on M. Lafarge was ineffaceable. My words and oaths were powerless to reassure him.

“Poor Marie,” he incessantly repeated, “must I die? I loved you so much; what will become of you?”

“Take courage, and you will still live long to be our happiness.”

“Speak not to me of happiness, the very word is a pang.”

“Be reasonable, then. Do you think my mouth could smile upon you if you were in danger?”

“O no; but you deceive me because they have deceived thee.”

I passed the whole night in preventing Aména from approaching her brother's bed; and when M. Bardon found, on his morning visit, an increase of fever and more alarming symptoms, I indignantly told him the scene of the previous evening, with a rancour most probably not over moderate.

I asked the doctor's permission to call in a physician. I wished to have M. Ségeral, whom my uncle Pontier had particularly recommended as a man of talent and heart. This did not seem

to please my mother-in-law ; and on Friday morning Denis brought M. Massénat from Brives, whose reputation stood very high in the province.

M. Massénat examined the patient attentively and at several intervals ; he informed himself, in a long conversation with M. Bardou, of the patient's constitution, his former illnesses, the causes to which they attributed his actual sufferings ; and then declared that he was in no danger—that it was a simple nervous affection, troublesome and painful, no doubt, but certain of cure. The serious and collected manners of M. Massénat made me receive this oracle with joy and security. But to be entirely reassured, I took him aside, and asked him, with trembling earnestness, to tell me the whole truth ; I also made Mademoiselle Brun ask him the same questions, and each time the answer was as positive.

The feebleness of pulse and coldness at the extremities particularly frightened me ; M. Massénat assured me that they were nervous symptoms only. He ordered, to alleviate them, an opiate, soothing drinks, and a little nourishment—such as thin soups, and chicken-

broths. I then begged M. Massénat to return on the morrow—I asked it as a favour; but he told me that the presence of M. Bardon was sufficient; that he had ordered accounts of the patient's progress to be sent him; and promised to return when a change of regimen should be necessary.

I was so pleased with this satisfactory and learned visit, that I easily reconciled myself to Madame Buffière. I had sent her from the chamber on the preceding evening in wrath and impatience; so, to make my peace, I engaged her to remain with me near her brother, and counselled his mother to take a few hours of repose.

“We are now free from fear; you are fatigued,” I said to her: “go and sleep; I will watch near Charles; do not disturb yourself.”

“You wish to be with him alone?”

“No! you know very well that this never occurs. I have not the strength to sustain his head, and the sight of his vomiting makes me dreadfully ill.”

“Go to bed, mamma,” said her son.

“I see very well you both wish to drive me away; but that matters not—I shall remain.”

“How unjust !” I cried.

“Yes, yes ; I comprehend that you would estrange me from my son—that you look on me as nothing in the house ; but I shall remain in it in spite of you, and we will see if you are to be its mistress.”

“My God, Madame, remain in your ruin ; when Charles is well I will remove far from your jealousies, your vile calumnies—if he loves me, he will follow me ; if he prefers you, I shall have sense enough not to weep.”

Not wishing to prolong these unjust recriminations, which must of necessity injure M. Lafarge, I left the chamber. I afterwards learnt that he and his mother had quarrelled violently after my departure ; that he had accused her of endeavouring to separate us ; and that he had even forbidden her to set foot in his chamber until she was reconciled with me. This made Madame Lafarge seek me, and beg me to excuse her vivacity, which she denominated an excess of maternal tenderness. In entreating me to forget my rancour, my mother-in-law would not forget her own ; and she and her daughter imagined a thousand modes of getting rid of me.

I was very ill, very tired, and very changed in my appearance. This gave them an opportunity of inspiring M. Lafarge with serious fears for my health; and he begged me to take care of myself—not to leave my couch or my bed; and as I had no longer real fears for him, I obeyed, without being quite the dupe of the inimical diplomacy of which I was the intended victim.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE small quantity of arsenic requested by M. Bardon had not been sufficient to exterminate our little colony of rats ; they had become still more odious to my husband, whose nerves were irritated by their racing and their continual squeakings above his head. They had also merited all my hatred by devouring my gowns, my linen, and, in short, all they found in my dressing-room. Determined to assemble formidable forces for their final extermination, I asked M. Denis to bring me a new dose of *ratsbane*, as also some rat-traps. Although I had inscribed both of these exterminating means on a list of commissions, M. Denis *forgot* the rat-traps, and brought me, after one of his journeys to Brives, a dose of arsenic only, so large, that I shewed it to M. Lafarge, to enable him to appreciate the steps I was about to take

to revenge him on his enemies. He approved them, but forbade my assisting to make the paste, whose injurious exhalations would, he feared, injure me. Clementine was charged with this care.

The night between Friday and Saturday was a very good one. I passed great part of it with Mademoiselle Brun; and in the morning, feeling worse and more fatigued than customary, I lay down and slept until ten o'clock, when Madame Buffière came to wake me, with inquiries as to my health, and to ask if I would take a little chicken-broth. Astonished at those unaccustomed attentions, I thanked her, but declined the broth, which I told her I always found insipid and disagreeable. She would not hear my objections, but assured me that she knew how to make chicken-broth so delicate and so nicely flavoured, that I should be sure to like it from her hand, and descended to the kitchen to set to work upon it.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, she brought me something which was nice enough. I had just swallowed it, when she returned from the chamber of M. Lafarge, and shewed herself miserable because I had not left a little

for her brother, who, she said, would have liked, *from sentiment*, to have partaken it with me. It was the idea of a sick man, which it was necessary to gratify : so Aména made a second cup of broth by my bed-side, with the intention of passing it off as the half of that which I had myself taken. M. Lafarge being asleep, she left it on my night-table. I kept it there some time ; but wishing to take a little repose, and not to be disturbed, I sent the chicken-broth to my sister-in-law, to be kept warm until her brother awoke.

On his arrival at mid-day, M. Bardon found our patient sufficiently well to be indulged with some bread soaked in Bourdeaux wine, or a little fowl and mashed potato. He also warned us, that having no fear for his recovery and a great deal of business upon his hands, he should not come on the morrow, which was Sunday ; and that we had only to administer scrupulously the opiates prescribed by M. Massénat, notwithstanding M. Lafarge's repugnance to them.

M. Magnaud returned from Faye during the day, and spoke privately to my husband, who, greatly disturbed by the news, which he would

not communicate to me, had a relapse, attended with increased fever; and he was much worse than on the preceding evening. I complained to Madame Buffière of these continual infractions of the physician's orders.

"We cannot always sacrifice ourselves, and pay for Charles," she said to me.

"If you do not wish me to fatigue him, Madame," added M. Magnaud, "sign me some blank acceptances, which I have in my portfolio, and I will no longer trouble him with my accounts."

I readily agreed to this, and approached my husband, to ask his authority for signing his name, when my sister-in-law and her agent prevented my doing so, by telling me that my signature was sufficient. I then signed a few slips of white paper, which they offered me, and, wishing to give a proof of order and exactness, added the date, contrary to my usual habits.

"Well, it's all to do over again," said M. Magnaud; "a woman's signature, to be available, should have no date."

Then tearing them up, he made me com-

mence again, this time without putting any date. There were bills for six or eight thousand francs.

Emma joined us in the evening, deeply terrified. She had been told in the morning at Uzerche, that the clerks at Glandier had stated that M. Lafarge was at the point of death: and she was glad indeed to share our hopes of his recovery, when she had come to partake of our sorrow and despair. The presence of Emma was very consoling to me. I told her all my past fears, and the reassuring statements of the physicians; and she repeated to me, like all the rest of the family, that there never existed a more impatient invalid than her cousin, and that she suspected him this time of exaggerating his sufferings even more than usual, for the sake of being loved and spoilt by me.

Towards midnight, I had myself an attack of cramp in the stomach, which compelled me to lie down, while Emma replaced me at the bed-side of M. Lafarge. I had told her how important it was that he should take his opiates, and how much he disliked doing so. She therefore employed my name every quarter of an hour, to induce him to swallow them.

“Take this, Charles, for the sake of Marie, who loves you so deeply,” she said.

“It is very disgusting; but for her sake I obey.”

“Charles, you were very glad to see her again?”

“Oh yes. You tell me that *she loves me*, then, do you?”

“Doubtless! I know well how she spoke of you to me when you were away.”

On hearing this, the poor sick man took his cousin's hands, and appeared to wish to thank her.

Soon after, Madame Lafarge and Aména got rid of Emma, under pretence of sending her to take care of me. She repeated to me all she had said to my husband; and in return, I told her of all the calumnies which had been sent against me to Paris, and of the hatred which was growing more visible every day. The poor girl was indignant. The same mistrust which surrounded me surrounded her also. She had remarked that they avoided her when they wished to speak to each other; that they appeared to have some important secrets to conceal; and that Aména had sent her out of

the room in a pet, that she might talk more unrestrainedly with M. Magnaud and Made-moiselle Brun.

A thousand conjectures passed through our minds. At last we concluded that these conversations related to some unfortunate speculations, which they wished to conceal, for fear of disquieting me; and the bills signed in the morning confirmed this idea, and somewhat diminished the rancour I felt at the hostile and unkindly conduct of the whole family.

At four in the morning, Emma and I resumed our places beside the patient. He appeared worse, and did not speak to me when I laid my hand upon his brow, and inquired as to its throbbing and its heat. During my absence, they had not once given him the prescribed opiate, which alone had the power to calm him. I remarked this with chagrin to Emma: he heard me, and signed to me to prepare him some of it.

As it was impossible to persuade M. Lafarge to taste a single drop of his emollient drinks, I took the opportunity, in preparing the opiates he consented to take, to add thereto a little

gum; and this time, according to custom, I had made the usual addition. I had no sooner done so, than Madame Lafarge snatched the cup from me, and shewed it to her son triumphantly, telling him not to take it, because I had put a white powder in it.

It was in vain that Emma remarked to her aunt, that it was only a little gum-arabic, which she had seen me put in. Madame Lafarge affected not to understand her; and when I had left the room, told her that it was so much the worse for me to give her son the gum, when M. Massénat had expressly interdicted its use to the invalid. Emma, who positively knew the contrary, wished to excuse me, and received nothing but humiliating and harsh reproofs, accompanied by an almost formal request to return to Uzerche, and an order not to trouble herself for the future with any thing which was passing round her.

Seeing me so unhappy, *so persecuted*, Emma went home for one day only, promising to return on the morrow, and courageously bear half of my disgrace. How grateful was I to her for that touching promise! Her devotion in

allowing me to exchange with her my thoughts of bitterness and discouragement, alone afforded me some little consolation in my suffering.

On Sunday morning I was very much astonished to find M. and Madame Denis installed alone at the bed-side of M. Lafarge. I asked why I had not been awakened in the absence of my mother-in-law and her daughter—why he was abandoned to the care of new persons, who were ignorant of the treatment of his illness and the attentions he required. I was answered that M. Lafarge had required it, and that he did not wish his *kind M. Denis* to leave him.

I approached my husband's bed; he looked at me a long time in silence, then carried my hand to his lips, and dropped a tear upon it as he kissed it. Madame Buffière, who entered during this, wished me to go away, under pretence that I wearied her brother. This he opposed, and said, "*Look at her.*" Then taking hold of some ringlets which had escaped from my cap, he rolled them round his fingers, and appeared to forget both of us in his own reflections.

He asked for drink—I rose to satisfy him, when Aména rushed on the glass, tore it from

my hands, and offered it herself to him. Deeply wounded, I was about to leave, when he called me, drew me towards him, and said, "Let them do it, but do not abandon me."

I had re-entered my chamber, to iron a gown and fasten up my hair, when Clementine came to inform me of the arrival of M. Fleyniat. I went immediately to see him; he was with my mother-in-law, and finding him with a sad and abstracted look, I became alarmed, and, drawing him aside, inquired whether there was danger, and what we must do if he became worse. He avowed to me that he did not share M. Bardon's security; that his *nourishing regimen* appeared to him an absurdity; and, lastly, that he was frightened by the icy coldness of the extremities, the weakness of the pulse, and the unnatural and uncommon symptoms presented by this illness.

"I beg you, then," I said, "to induce my mother-in-law to call in another physician, instead of M. Bardon."

"But she tells me that it is you who oppose it."

"I! why for a week past I have in vain implored her to send for M. Ségeral."

He appeared *greatly astonished* at my answer, and advised me immediately to send to Brives for M. Ségeral, to require that he should come every day, and to have no more to do with M. Bardon, whose want of skill was very generally known, and for whom he could not explain the family partiality.

M. Fleyniat, seeing how much he had troubled me, now tried to calm me. He told me that very possibly he had exaggerated the danger; that M. Massénat had not acknowledged it; and that his decision was an oracle on which he would confidently rely. Then returning to the chamber of M. Lafarge, he again examined him attentively, permitted him to take some beer, instead of barley-water, and ordered me to give him some lukewarm water to encourage the vomiting, and cause the stomach to reject the hurtful matter which might have been introduced there.

I was obliged to encounter the ill-will and almost brutal opposition of Mesdames Lafarge and Buffière, before I could administer this last prescription. According to them, I wished to stifle, wear out, and kill M. Lafarge by new vomitings. But their accusations could not

shake me—I was inexorable; and in spite of them, I took several cups of water to my husband, who did not dare refuse them from my hand, and who was relieved by them, until his mother gave him a great glass of beer, when the insupportable burning in the stomach returned, with violent cramp and agony.

To finish my desolation, I learned that they had prevented the departure of the labourer whom I had sent to Brives to fetch M. Ségeral; and that, under some pretext, Madame Lafarge had despatched her *faithful Denis* alone to Labersac, to seek another physician, M. Lespinas.

In the evening, M. Magnaud arrived. His presence seemed to dispel the uneasiness caused in my mother-in-law by M. Fleyniat. He told me he had business to speak about to M. Lafarge, and wished to be left alone with him. I objected to him the fatigue of mind it would cause, so dangerous in such a critical moment; but when he assured me that he brought good news, more fit to cure than to injure my husband, I left them alone together. I perceived, on my return, that M. Magnaud's presence had produced an effect quite opposite to the one he

had appeared to expect, and that the illness and the pangs had never so violently contracted the features of the poor patient. He turned his head away on my approach, and did not appear to perceive the affectionate kiss I laid upon his hand.

I then sat myself near the fire-place, before which Mademoiselle Brun, Madame Buffière, and M. Magnaud, were talking and laughing together, and gave way to despair and frightful discouragement. The scarcely veiled hatred expressed to me by the whole family—the wall reared by their persons and their calumnies between me and my husband—that petty persecution, which wounded me continually, but did not suffice to kill me,—appeared alike odious and intolerable.

Yet I must bear it. Poor Charles's sufferings, still more than my duty, chained me to Glandier. I raised my eyes by chance to the countenances of my enemies: they were basely smiling and triumphant. The contempt this inspired took the place of my despair, and gave me strength to reason on it.

“I advise you to go to bed, Marie,” said Madame Buffière, with a sneer; “you are

pale ; and it will please my brother, who being more habituated to my attentions, prefers them to yours.”

“ Do not trouble yourself about me, Madame : my place is here, and here I shall remain, as long as I think it useful and proper to do so.”

Then concealing my previous grief in the depths of my soul, I took a book, and isolated myself both from their persecution and their presence.

On that evening M. Magnaud's *amiability* was insupportable. He awoke Madame Lafarge with the feathers of a pen ; embraced Mademoiselle Brun by force, Madame Buffière with her own good will ; and at last selected the latter for a pillow, and slept soundly on her shoulder. As I appeared to observe all this with astonishment, Madame Buffière said to me,

“ What would you ? He is like a brother to us.”

At two in the morning, M. Lespinas entered, escorted by M. Denis. All the sleeping eyes opened to receive him with a tear. Madame Buffière would have led him into the embrasure of a window to speak to him, but he told her

Denis had mentioned the state of the patient to him; and going to the bed of M. Lafarge, felt his pulse, asked him a question or two, gave him a draught which he had brought with him, and then came to warm himself, and speak to me.

I thanked M. Lespinas for braving the night and the cold to comfort illness and fear, and prayed him to tell me all he thought respecting my husband's condition. He told me he thought him affected by an obstruction of the stomach, a troublesome and tedious, but not a dangerous, disorder—at least not immediately dangerous. He then asked me if I liked my new country; if I was weary of my solitude; and if my love for horse-exercise was strong enough to make me brave winter and bad roads? In answering these questions, I examined M. Lespinas, and attempted to discover what had been the motive for giving him the family confidence in preference to M. Ségeral.

He was a young man, with a brief sharp style of speech, full of ordinary and trifling expressions. Obstinacy and vanity, instead of intellect, illuminated his brow. The self-love

of the physician was to be read in his eye, and the folly of the man smiled on his mouth. While he was warming himself, buried in a huge arm-chair, his feet on the hobs, rubbing his hands or passing them through his hair, Madame Buffière offered him some *eau sucrée*, called him their saviour, and sobbed while she told him how much she loved her brother. Madame Lafarge also gave vent to some exclamations of despair and mysterious sighs ; while Mademoiselle Brun, Magnaud, and Denis, talked together with a sinister and affected reserve.

“My God, sir !” I cried, “conceal nothing from me,” as I detected a dark glance of intelligence between my sister-in-law and the physician. “Is there any danger ? I will send for M. Ségeral—I am dreadfully uneasy ; no mystery, I implore you !”

“It is useless to have a second physician, since Monsieur tells us it is a long and chronic complaint,” answered Aména. “But you are fatigued—go and rest yourself ; we will watch to-night.”

“Charles himself desires it,” added my mother-in-law.

“Yes, Madame,” said M. Lespinas, joining them. “It will be a long illness; reserve your strength to employ it hereafter: it is indispensable.”

Exiled by these hypocritical cares for my health from my husband’s bed-side—seeing my rights, my duties, and my attentions usurped—I went out very indignant, very wretched, uncomfortable even by a single word from my poor sick husband, who let me go in this manner, without one of those looks which protested against the bitter cup which they forced upon me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON the Monday, I was astonished at the change in M. Lafarge. His eyes were fixed, his colour livid. I saw death on his brow . . . and, without a word, I fell on my knees to weep and pray over his already icy hand.

My husband's look was by turns fond, loving, angry, terrifying. If I left him, he called me back with one of love; if I approached, he turned away in wrath. He appeared to wish to question and reproach me,—and his mother, his sister, Denis, interrupted his words, hid from me his eyes, stole from me even the silent expression of his thoughts.

Nor was this all I had to endure; the chamber was filled with friends of the family, strangers to me—who were spies on my movements—who counted my tears and registered my griefs. I was informed that they communi-

cated their remarks to Mademoiselle Brun—to the clerks; that they whispered; that they calumniated, even in that critical hour. Unable longer to endure this torture, I shut myself in my chamber, and let the tears which stifled me run freely down my cheek.

One must lose more than oneself—one must lose a father or a mother, to feel one of those vast, infinite sorrows, which hurl their despair, their sobs, and their cries into the midst of the world's indifference; which find a desert among mankind; which have forgotten all except the tomb which is about to enclose their treasure, and heaven which is to restore it to them in eternity. Calmer and more reasonable griefs, which disturb without crushing life, are felt fully but in loneliness; they are the throbs, the regrets, of a suffering heart, rather than the death-cries of a heart in agony. They dread to appear exaggerated to some, and cold to others.

The memories of that last day have left terror and anguish in my soul, but not a positive fact in my memory. It is a fearful nightmare, from which I have awakened trembling, thrilling, with a real suffering, produced by ima-

ginary tortures. *So near death we do not see life, we feel it.*

I only know that Emma came to me with friendship and tears; that many times, wishing to return to the bed-side of the unhappy Charles, a bolt arrested my steps I know that, wishing to bring to that pillow, whence they chased me, calm and hope, I sent for a priest; that he came, and that I united my prayers to his I know that a little later the family brought me consolation, attention, tenderness, and a paper to sign that it was then permitted me to approach the bed of death, but that there was neither look nor adieu from him who had loved me I know that they tore from me the sad delight of moistening his burning lips, of raising his poor head, of chafing his icy hands I know that Emma made me leave the chamber, to spare me all these proofs of hatred—that I was very ill—that towards the morning she quitted me no more—that she wept more bitterly—that I interrogated her, and that she said to me, covering me with kisses,—

“ I love you, Marie ; I love you for both.”

It was late on the following day when that

heavy sleep of grief with which God dries tears and checks thought, passed from my eyelids, and restored me to life and the sorrows of reality.

My first thought was for the poor mother. I wished to mingle my regrets and tears with hers—I wished to honour the memory of him who had left us, by promising love and filial obedience to his mother; and I forgot that she did not love me, and that she had made me suffer, to remember only the cares, the love, and the respect, which were become a duty and a heritage to the widow of her poor child.

Emma kept me back; she told me that her aunt was calm, that my presence would be a new sorrow, which would too bitterly reawaken her stupified grief. She added, that her aunt had charged her to embrace and attend to me, and requested me to defer our sad meeting until the following day.

This resolution troubled me. Our hearts, until now strangers, needed union in their sorrow, to mingle in their first grief, in the sudden bursts, and in the incoherent expressions of despair. The new feelings of life often find all a past in a single tear.

My day was passed with Emma; she was full of sadness. M. Buffière alone came to cast himself into my arms, and to weep a long time with me. He told me that his wife was ill in bed; that she, like himself, loved me as a sister; he assured me afterwards that he would continue for me all he had done for his brother-in-law, and made me sign a blank power of attorney, which was to give him the means of being useful to me.

Emma, on returning to me after my cousin's departure, asked me, with a kind of uneasiness, how he had conducted himself. I recounted our conversation to her, word by word. She appeared astonished as I spoke, became abstracted, anxious; then, taking my two hands, said to me,—

“I love you much, Marie, and am about to prove it to you. I will pass no rash judgment upon my family, but I entreat you, I beg you, as a favour, to trust your papers to no one. They talk incessantly of wills—ask me if you have one—what you intend doing with it—and what it contains.”

These words of Emma made me reflect on the will M. Lafarge had made in my favour. We were a long time finding it; a longer still,

when we had found it, before deciding what we should do with it. Emma told me that there were formalities to fulfil, in order to render it available, as she had heard her aunt say; but as we neither of us knew in what they consisted, she advised me to send it to Soissons, to my lawyer.

Emma was so suspicious, that she would not let me keep it a single night in our chamber; and we had it carried to the post-office by my servant, although it was very late. I also wrote some letters to my family, in which I asked them to come to me, telling them of my grief, without mentioning my persecutions.

Early in the evening, I asked Clementine to inquire after my mother and sister-in-law. She refused to go, telling me that while I wept they robbed me; that I attended to nothing, and should become their dupe, &c. &c. Hurt at these statements, I forbade all other explanations on the part of poor Clementine, and told her rather harshly to leave my chamber. She obeyed, but returned a minute after with my cook, who assured me Clementine had told the truth, and that it was she who had warned her of it.

“They will ruin you—they will turn us all out, if Madame does not show herself mistress. Yesterday evening the plate was taken away, under pretence of securing it; and they wanted the labourer, Joseph, to take it to Faye, but he refused to wrong Madame, whom he loves as we do. Madame Lafarge, the mother, has also said to me, that if I would be in her interests she would recompense me, because she was the heir. Would you believe it? this morning, when poor master was scarcely dead, she took out all that was in his trunks near his bed, without even making the sign of a cross in behalf of his poor soul,” &c. &c.

These words struck me; but, thinking them exaggerated by the devotion of Clementine, and Mion’s zeal, I forbade them to repeat them to any one, promising to make myself strong enough to preserve them from every vexation; and I endeavoured to chase from my mind the suspicion they had instilled. It seemed to me an insult to the memory of my husband, to estimate too nicely the steps his mother was taking.

On Wednesday morning Madame Lafarge entered my chamber, and embraced me, with-

out shedding a tear. She came to tell me that Aména, too ill to leave her room, and, above all, desirous of seeing me, begged me to come and weep with her over her brother, and soften my sufferings by sharing them.

The door which communicated between my chamber and my mother-in-law's was open. I heard Madame Buffière cry out, "Marie—my sister, come, I entreat you." I leapt from my bed, and rushed into her arms, having only cast a mantilla over my shoulders.

My sister-in-law, in deep mourning, was sitting near the fire, but she did not appear to be very ill. She received me with all the appearances of despair, crying, that she felt she was dying, and that she wished to die. She then asked me for the patent, that she might cover it with kisses, and seemed not to believe me when I assured her that I had it not, and knew not where to find it, calling me cruel to refuse her so great a consolation. On a sudden, I heard steps approaching. I wished to re-enter my apartment; the bolt was drawn; in vain I knocked, calling on Clementine, who came and told me that my mother-in-law had shut

herself up there with a locksmith, and was forcing the secretaire.

“It cannot be—that would be too infamous!” I cried.

“My mother is mistress here, and does what she chooses,” answered Aména, angrily.

“The mistress ! then why steal what belongs to herself?”

At this moment, M. de Lespinas, manager of the stables of Pompadour, and M. Boucheron, the registrar, entered the chamber where I was ; and on their arrival, my sister-in-law resumed her tears, her soft voice, and her demonstrations of tenderness towards me. Appalled, I remained several minutes unconscious of their visit, forgetting my strange costume, my disordered hair, the mantilla which scarcely covered me, and my naked arms and feet. I had not a tear, not a complaint, not a word—the indignation of the wife had vanquished the modesty of the woman. A curious look from one of these gentlemen at last restored me to myself. I begged them to leave me alone ; they retired, and soon after the door of my chamber was opened.

I had scarcely power to re-enter it, and shut myself up with Clementine. The poor girl was even more disgusted with these persecutions than I was. She shewed me the secret drawer which they had burst to carry away the contracts, title-deeds, and important documents which it contained. She also made me observe that they had carried away all my jewels, the portrait of my mother, my father's hair, all the treasures of my souvenirs.

While I endeavoured to account to myself for this last dishonour—so cruel, if they envied me the value those objects had to my heart; so base, if they speculated on their material value,—Emma entered, and cast herself pale and trembling on my neck, speechless with grief. Believing that she suffered from the new insult which had been added to my tortures, I endeavoured to calm her, and to conceal from her what I felt, by calling her my sister, my friend, and my good angel. But she did not answer me; parting my hair from my forehead, she looked upon me wildly, and then exclaimed with sobs,—

“Marie, they say you have poisoned him; that you have killed Charles in order to wed

another Marie, it is impossible ! is it not ? —impossible !—impossible !”

“The wretches ! But no, it cannot be—you deceive yourself. Oh, in pity speak ! Emma, speak—tell me all !”

“My aunt and Aména have told me so ; oh, I have heard but too much—they tell it to all the world—they relate such frightful things ! My God ! my God ! you are lost !”

“Lost !—I defy them ! Calm yourself, Emma ; you have shared with me all those last moments—you know whether I am innocent . . . I will say so—we will tell them so they shall believe us. No, no, these calumnies will never harm me.”

“But, Marie, you had arsenic they have found it in the chicken-broth If you were deceived !—if a fatal mistake !”—

“It is impossible !—I may have put gum in it ; but that very gum, I have eaten it before, I have eaten it since.”

“Did you know what you have in the little box that I took from you yesterday ?”

“What I have ?—gum !”

“Alas ! no. I made M. Fleyniat examine it—it is arsenic !”

“Arsenic! impossible! I repeat to you, Emma, I have eaten that gum. Your uncle is deceived. Be calm, I entreat you. God! is he not in heaven to save the innocent that they accuse on earth?”

Clementine was in as great despair as my cousin. Their grief terrified me. Both spoke of justice, of the Court of Assizes, and the scaffold. I should have become mad, had I not been compelled to forget myself in order to console them.

M. Fleyniat was at Glandier; I had him summoned to have a frank and positive explanation of those abominable and foul calumnies. He came with an embarrassed air; I told him that I knew all, and breathed some slight reproaches in regard to his silence towards me. I asked him on what foundation they grounded these monstrous suspicions—formed, I wished to believe, by a mother’s grief, yet whose absurdity it was necessary for me to prove, because they were accusations which it was impossible to pass over in silence.”

After having assured me very wordily that he believed me innocent, M. Fleyniat told

me, that I was accused of having sent poisoned cakes to Paris. That a brother of M. Buffière had warned the family of it, on learning the illness of M. Lafarge; that M. Essartier had discovered arsenic in the chicken-broth I wished the invalid to take; that Madame Lafarge had seen me, with her own eyes, put arsenic in a potion; and that, lastly, I had poisoned a piece of flannel, that I might hasten the death of my husband by friction.

I felt reassured, on listening to these accusations,—they appeared to me so easy of refutation. The cakes had been made by my mother-in-law herself; the chicken-broth had been prepared by the desire, and under the superintendence, of Madame Buffière; and all the frictions had been made by Messieurs Buffière and Denis. I could not therefore have put poison in the flannel.

In explaining these circumstances to M. Fleyniat, I gave him to understand that I did not intend them as a defence; that far from accepting the position of one accused, I claimed by too good right the position of a victim. It was impossible not to believe my mother-in-law to be absolutely mad; and, to terminate all

these calumnious and infamous lies, I resolved to strengthen myself with the testimony of the physicians who had attended the sick man,—Messieurs Bardon, Massénat, and Lespinas, who had given me hope in the last moments, and had always combatted my fears. M. Fleyniat told me I should address myself to M. Lespinas in vain—that he believed me guilty, *boasted* of having discovered *the crime*, and had demanded an examination of the corpse. I also learned that Madame Lafarge had opposed this measure, saying to M. Lespinas and to several persons, that I had formally refused the examination, and had hastened all the last ceremonies in order to avoid it.

I begged M. Fleyniat to deny this last assertion, and in my name to require the examination. I begged him to be present at that mournful operation. I also again demanded the presence of the often-refused M. Ségeral ; and the hope of speedily eliciting the truth, clear, evident, and palpable to all, gave me strength to support the existing suspicions, and to walk without sinking in that path of sorrow, persecution, and anguish.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE justice of peace of Lubersac came to place the seals on my effects. Emma, in telling me of his arrival, begged me, in the name of M. Fleyniat, to burn all the papers and letters which could compromise me, and to profit by the few minutes yet left me, in putting them beyond the reach of the scrutinising and rigid inquisitions of the law.

I made my kind little cousin understand, that such counsel as she gave me in the name of her uncle was unworthy of my innocence; that being free from remorse, I was also free from fear, and only wished to preserve a packet of letters written by me to M. Lafarge, which had been returned to me in the morning, and in which I hoped to discover facts which might justify me.

Prejudiced by the calumnies of the Lafarge

family, the men of law, as they entered my chamber, cast around them curious and condemnatory looks, which fell like lead upon me. This first unmerited humiliation was a horrible anguish. My brow reddened; tears gushed from my eyes; and I was about to sink under my misfortune, when a look of Emma's, full of hope and love, roused an unknown courage in me, and made me feel that, supported by noble and kindly affections, I could encounter destiny bravely.

All my papers were read and commented on; my open albums, my gum, my almond-paste, were gathered together with exaggerated precautions, and a strange excess of threatening significance and cruelty.

The father of M. Buffière, leaning against the chimney, appeared to direct their researches, to elicit hatred, and to keep it alive by perfidious and accusing allusions; and I could scarcely restrain the indignation of Emma—the anger of Clementine—and teach them contempt, which preserves us from these two sentiments.

All these men had barely left my room, when my servant rushed into it in despair, crying out,
“ My poor mistress, they say that I shall

cause you to mount the scaffold, and that I shall mount it too.”

Terror-stricken at this new incident, we had scarcely the power to calm him—to calm ourselves—sufficiently to understand the recital of his terribly foolish and imprudent conduct ; and which, indeed, compromised me effectually.

Clementine had charged him to kill the rats, and had given him the arsenic fetched by Denis. Occupied at the moment, my servant had placed it in an old hat, and had forgotten it for two days ; then, having been warned of the suspicion which had been secretly raised against me, and being fearful that he should be included in the accusation, if the poison were found in his possession, he had confided his fears to the groom ; and both had thought it prudent to bury the packet of arsenic in the garden. That prudence, however, did not prevent their babbling. Their secret, confided to three or four persons, had been denounced to Madame Buffière ; who, in her turn, had denounced it to the justice of peace, who had the packet dug up from the garden.

Alfred was severely examined as to his recital, and the apparent culpability of his con-

duct: they threatened him with the *scaffold*, if he did not avow that he had acted by my orders. They told him that his silence would destroy himself without saving me; that he had opened to them the traces of the crime. And the unhappy youth, who knew me to be innocent, who was devoted to me, and who was above all things a coward, tore his hair, and would have killed himself, that he might not be condemned to die.

I was crushed by this concourse of accusing appearances, and for some time was incapable of consoling the very stupid, but very innocent *cause* of this new charge. At last I reasoned with the poor despairing fellow; told him that he had nothing personally to fear, and enjoined him to be calm, exact, and precise in his words; then I pardoned him all the involuntary injury he might have done me, and assured him that, as justice was superior to all appearances, innocence should be above all fear.

The cook succeeded to Alfred, and came to me as exasperated as he was, but without fear. She came to tell me that Madame Lafarge accused her of having poisoned the cakes sent to Paris; that they affected to mistrust her, and

would take no nourishment prepared by her hands.

“It is atrocious,” she added; “it will cause the good God and his saints to blush! Denis and Buffière plunder the forge. The mother and daughter are mowing the house like a meadow. There are a parcel of clowns who set out every night to Faye, under the escort of the old Buffière, and come back in the morning to eat and drink all the provisions which remain in the house. It is very painful to see Madame weep and take on so, while we take her interests to heart.”

I was obliged still to preach patience and silence; and Mion went away weeping, and repeating that I was good as good bread, but that I trusted so much to my honesty of purpose, that they would manage to ruin me.

I learnt from Mion that the accusations against me had been received with a great deal of indignation by the servants and workmen; that no one dared to mention them openly in the kitchen. This was a great pleasure to me, for I felt less deserted.

Towards evening M. Buffière wished to see me. In spite of all my repugnance, I yielded

to his wish, and to the counsel of Emma. He came hypocritically to ask after my health, to tell me that he had been obliged to absent himself on business, and was quite ignorant why they had decided that there should be an examination of the body. I asked him if he was also ignorant of the accusations of his wife and mother-in-law. He formally denied at first that they were guilty of *the calumny* I imputed to them. But when I cited M. Fleyniat as the person who had informed me, he contented himself with saying they were *mad*, and that sorrow had bewildered them; then, assuring me of his tenderness with tears, he called himself my very tender and devoted brother.

I soon learnt the motive of this visit and this farce. The paper they had induced me to sign for M. Roque, on the day of M. Lafarge's death, was not available. M. Buffière wished to make me sign a second, and, in a circuitous way, made me comprehend that such generosity would soften the denunciations of the family by proving my disinterestedness. At this perfidious and odious insinuation, I looked fixedly on him; and I caused his eyes to fall, and made his brow grow pale beneath my glance.

“I understand you,” I said to him; “and I swear to you that I will sign no paper until truth shall have confounded both the calumny and those who framed it.”

“But you deceive yourself with respect to my intentions. If you refuse to sign, M. Roque will declare M. Lafarge a bankrupt—you will ruin yourself—you will disgrace us”...

“My part is taken—it is irrevocable; M. Roque shall wait the attestation of the surgeons. I will sign nothing before—you have my last word.”

On the next day all the members of the family arrived. Some few only asked to see me. Messieurs Joseph Matere and H. Brugère would not leave me during the sinister proceedings which were to decide between me and my enemies. There was heart in their words and in their looks. I should have preferred being alone in this hour of anguish—still, their presence was not painful to me.

That day, an age of anxiety and suffering, was my initiation to the bitternesses of my future.

The fatality which attended me having been manifested by the concourse of accusing circumstances which had arisen to crush me

during the last ten days, my conscience was sometimes powerless to preserve me from those fearful thoughts that passed through my brain during the trial which was to decide both my life and my honour. My chamber was isolated—no news came there. Clementine, Emma, and my two cousins, went in turns to ascertain what was going forward. No longer able to conquer my restlessness, I profited by a moment, when I was left alone, to ask of M. Rivet, *procureur du roi* at Brives, a short interview. He came, moved and compassionate. He was an aged man, gentle and venerable in appearance; he gave me hope of a happy result, and told me that the operation, already somewhat advanced, had not caused the discovery of the least indication of poison.

An hour, two hours more, rolled on—every messenger returned with increased hope in his eyes; at last M. Fleyniat rushed into my chamber—no arsenic had been found! I cast myself weeping into the arms of Emma, and offered my acknowledged innocence to that sweet girl as the only return worthy of her beautiful devotion.

M. Bardon himself came to confirm the good

tidings. He told me, that not for one instant had he shared the suspicions; that the malady had been natural; that he had always been convinced of it; and that the presumptuous confidence of M. Lespinas had alone caused so much trouble. He told me, also, that M. Lespinas had appeared to remark, during the examination, corrosions and traces of poison, invisible to all his companions. But his opinion had been forced to bend to theirs, and he was infuriated at not having been infallible. I asked if all was ended. He told me that there remained some chemical experiments to make upon the drinks which had been preserved.

I was surrounded by friends and congratulations, when the men of justice, the gendarmes, Madame Lafarge, and Madame Buffière entered, to make me sign the bottles containing the liquids destined for analysis. The first wore a look of compassion; they reassured me by their words and looks; the ladies, on the contrary, appeared humiliated and affrighted. In marking some of the bottles, I shewed an emotion which made my hand tremble, and the registrar said to me—

“Reassure yourself, Madame, the opinion

of these gentlemen is, that arsenic given in such strong and frequent doses would have caused ravages visible to the eye. Reassure yourself, then, there is nothing more to fear."

"That is not sure yet," said Madame Buffière, with a voice intended for a sobbing one; "there are some white things in these liquids which are not natural."

Madame Lafarge went out, and returned with a bit of flannel. "They have rubbed my son with this flannel, I desire it may be analysed." "I beg you, Messieurs," added she, "to envelop it entirely in paper. The white powder I remarked must not be allowed to evaporate."

There was a general movement of surprise. The registrar obeyed in silence. M. Roque, who since the morning had called on me frequently, again requested to speak with me.

I begged all the family to retire, and was left alone with him. He expressed to me, first, the share he had taken in my troubles, and how pleased he was at the happy result of the measures which had justified me. Then he said to me—

"My good lady, I have come myself. You

are young, separated from your family, very ignorant of business ; I would warn you of the dangers which surround you. Madame Buffière has made you sign a blank power of attorney, by which we might seize your whole fortune. It is here ; tear it, and sign instead the little paper I offer you, and which cannot compromise you.”

I was touched by this good faith, which protected my ignorance.

I expressed my feelings to him. He asked if I had a solicitor. On learning that I knew no one in the province, and that I had not thought about it, he promised to choose one, and send him to me.

I wished to inform my sister and my aunts of the calumnies and persecutions that I had suffered, as well as to inform them of the positive lie given to my accusers by the examination of the body. I seized the first moment of repose to write to them. Madame Lafarge, who was in the kitchen when the labourer Joseph received the order to go to Uzerche to post the letters, immediately ascended to my room, and entered it without being announced.

“ Come, my daughter,” she said, embracing

me. "Grief had affected my mind. I have accused you unjustly. I beg your pardon, before Emma, before Clementine, in the name of our poor deceased; do not bear malice."

I could make no answer.

"I am sure that you are about to annoy and afflict your family, by telling them of your distress and our suspicions. Be reasonable. I promise you we will love you well; we will care for your interests as if they were our own. I beg of you, do not disquiet your friends too much."

"Oh, Madame, I have suffered so much, that I have need to open my heart to those I love."

"How malicious and susceptible you are!"

"*Susceptible*, Madame! You forget what you have said, while pointing me out to justice and the world: 'Behold the wretch! behold the poisoner!'"

Madame Lafarge began to weep, to pray me to be reconciled with her, and to forget my suspicions. She was the mother of my husband,—an old, unhappy, widowed woman, in mourning for her son: I made an effort therefore to conquer my sorrowful resentment.

“A single question yet. Have you told your suspicions to poor Charles? Have you added the agony of the heart to the agony of the body? Have you called the curse of a dying man upon my head? If you can tear from my soul so torturing a thought, I will then endeavour to forget, and to commence the duty I owe you.”

My mother-in-law embraced me, and swore she had said nothing to her son. She persuaded me not to send my letters the same evening, and even to write others, which should partially conceal my indignation and my woes.

Madame Buffière being recalled to Faye by her business and her children, came to excuse herself and bid me adieu. She also begged me not to be annoyed at her taking her mother with her, and keeping her for some time at her house.

I was comforted by this temporary absence. I needed solitude and time to forget the past, and to undertake, not an affection henceforth impossible, but the strict observance of my duties. The news of the departure of Madame Lafarge being spread in the neighbourhood, the labourers and the peasants were indignant

at her desertion of me. The *adjoint* and a good old peasant of Blyssac came to reproach her and oppose her project.

“God will not bless you,” they said, “for thus abandoning your son’s widow. Your daughter has her husband; your daughter-in-law is without family, hope, or children. You must console her, and she must console you. Every one will say that it is infamous of you. The poor dear widow is neither proud nor haughty—she has always a good word for the poor. You must not leave her to go into the country.”

Madame Lafarge appeared moved by these frank and touching exhortations: she promised to return. As for me, I seized the rough hands of these two men, and I pressed them with all my heart, praying them to come again to see me, and to aid me with their counsels and their kindness. If I have never since seen those honest peasants, I preserve their memory amongst those which have fortified me against sorrow and trial by softening them.

CHAPTER XXV.

EMMA had been compelled to return to Uzerche for two days. I remained therefore alone in these ruins, shattered by time, and now iced by death,—alone, without relations, without friends, with a few devoted servants; with M. Denis instituted guardian of the seals, and who had declared himself my superintendent and my master.

Free then, and believing myself above suspicion, my first thought had been to return to the bosom of my family, if I had not hoped the blessing of becoming a mother—if I had not felt that I should preserve, for my dear little child, the fortune, the family, the friends, of his father. I suffered much; but the life of my little *Jacqueline* appeared revealed to me by that very suffering; and I blessed it, and derived from it even strength and courage.

This hope was also the hope of the brave workmen who had attached themselves to me. They made themselves acquainted, by means of Clementine, with the condition of their future mistress; and when they heard of my sicknesses and of my widened dresses, they were happy, and thought as I did. I was obliged to separate myself from my good founders: I had no work to give them. M. Denis made them endure a martyrdom. I was too weak, too abandoned, to protect them; so I advised them to take work in a neighbouring forge. They departed weeping, promising me to return at the first word on my part. They all told me the forge was in a deplorable state; that during the last few days every thing portable had been borne to Faye; and that there were many reports concerning the enormous debts M. Lafarge had left.

In writing to my aunt Garat, I begged her, in case none of my family could come to Glandier, to send me a solicitor, who might set things in order around me, and give me a little resignation. I shrank appalled from my life and my future duties; I knew not how I could live alone, far from my friends—

how I could stifle my imagination under figures—how I could make my thoughts *industrious*;—I only knew that if I had a child, I should love it so much that all things would become possible for it. M. Roque came, as he had promised me, with his advocate. He had struck a balance in his books, after a scrupulous examination, by which it appeared he was a creditor to the amount of 28,000 francs, which he begged me to secure to him upon my settlement. This sum appeared very large to me; knowing that there were many other creditors, and not wishing to be unjust and give all to one, I asked M. Roque to await the arrival of a member of my family, before entering on this new engagement. M. Roque told me that this delay would force him to take legal proceedings, and that M. de Violaine, my brother-in-law, would find himself mixed up in the matter most disagreeably. As I did not comprehend how my brother-in-law could have been compromised in these money-matters, he shewed me a letter. He appeared stupified when I assured him that the style, writing, and signature were not those of M. de Violaine.

After a moment's silence, M. Roque drew from his pocket a bundle of bills, and asked me if I knew the names which were written on them; and as I answered him in the negative, he said that it was horrible—that all these bills were forged; that M. Lafarge had unworthily swindled him; and that if he were not dead, he would have sent him to the galleys.

I was thunderstruck at these words; but soon learnt the value of money, by repurchasing, for 28,000 francs, the honour of the name I bore. I signed, exacting only of M. Roque absolute silence.

M. Lalande, M. Roque's lawyer, then entered upon my business. He asked me if I had a will? I told him that I had placed it in my solicitor's hands at Soissons; but that it was useless, since I believed myself with child.

“You deceive yourself,” he answered; “the family say your pregnancy only exists in *your imagination*.”

“But, sir, it is my mother-in-law herself who has employed all her cares, and very many words, to convince me of that which you now deny.”

“ Perhaps it was a good way to prevent M. Lafarge from providing for your future, and of preventing a will in your favour.”

M. Lalande then spoke to me of the calumnies which had pursued me. He informed me that Madame Lafarge was stopping at Pompadour, and had not renounced her odious accusations. I did not disturb myself at this uncharitable conduct of my mother-in-law, nor did it astonish me.

I had learnt from a little god-daughter of Madame Buffière, before whom they spoke openly enough, that these ladies had been annoyed that no arsenic was found in the body, and that during the whole evening following the examination they would repeat, “ How inconceivably unfortunate it was to find no poison !” I also learnt that these ladies spoke of me in terms most outrageous and most hateful. This young girl, whom I scarcely knew until M. Lafarge’s return, had shared my watching and care near the invalid. Good and compassionate, she felt assured that I was not guilty, that I might become a victim ; and she had loved me, and had thought it her duty to inform me of the hatred secretly indulged towards me. The mo-

ther of Charlotte, M. Lafarge's nurse, shared the sympathy and generous devotion of her daughter. They have preserved the one and proved the other to the last. Ancient affections, prayers, and threats have shaken neither. May they be honoured in their constancy !

I asked M. Lalande what was the opinion at Brives on the subject of the accusation made against me. He told me that they awaited the result of the experimental researches before pronouncing on it ; but he could not conceal from me that the frequent journeys of Messieurs Magnaud, Buffière, and Denis, had been hurtful to me, and that if these suspicions strengthened, and I should be placed at a criminal bar, evidence would not suffice to exculpate me with the inhabitants of Limousin, always malevolent, envious, and slanderous of strangers.

“ In that case, Madame,” added M. Lalande, “ you must fly ; and I will assist your flight before they have taken measures to arrest you—I will be near you. I have a cabriolet, a good horse, and a passport given to my wife, which will suit you to a marvel. I beg you not to

refuse my offer. Deign to listen to my voice, which is that of prudence and of reason.”

I thanked M. Lalande with emotion, but refused his offers.

“You are wrong,” he said to me again; “a great magistrate has declared, ‘If they accused me of having stolen the towers of Notre Dame, I would fly, rather than await a trial.’”

I begged M. Lalande not to weaken my resolution, which I believed to be both honourable and bold, and to allow me to believe in justice as I believed in my innocence. In the end, I accepted with gratitude advice which he gave me, not for flying from, but for resisting danger.

M. Roque, who continued to display his interest in me, asked me if I had no need of money. I told him, with sufficient embarrassment, that I did not possess a sou. He offered me, with great kindness, a cheque on his bankers: I accepted it; and he had the kindness to send me, on the next day, one for some hundred francs.

Emma returned from Uzerche quite as devoted as she went; not having allowed her

friendship to wither or to bend before the foul breath of the wicked, who had endeavoured to shake it. The dull, heavy silence which oppressed me, made me fear the storm: my conscience could scarcely reassure me. I felt that, from the concussion of so many calumnies, the lightning might evolve to destroy me. Every day, every hour, brought us new apprehensions. The letter of the fifteenth of August had been placed in the hands of justice on the day following M. Lafarge's death, as the foundation of the accusations, by M. Buffière, who, after having offered my head to the axe of the executioner, had returned to Glandier that he might lay upon my lips the kiss of peace, and declare himself a stranger to the blamable suspicions of his wife. The powder found in the chicken-broth was recognised as arsenic—the quantity was immense; and they said it was I who had directed that drink to be given him. Mademoiselle Brun, who had left on the night of the death, with M. Fleyniat, preserved a mysterious silence on all that had passed, but suffered from accusatory nervous attacks, during which, thinking she saw me putting

arsenic in the chicken-broth, she turned her finger with a frightful and persevering rapidity. She could not sleep alone, and needed a person to reassure her, and listen to her dreams. To sum up all, Denis went through all the towns and villages, relating that during a fortnight I had fed M. Lafarge with arsenic—that he should like to see me cut into pieces; while Magnaud assured M. Lafarge's numerous creditors, that, before poisoning him, I had entirely ruined him by my mad extravagance.

My letters were intercepted; I wished to send my faithful Clementine to Paris to tell my family of all my agonies. Her departure was denounced—the good creature was about to be arrested and imprisoned, as my accomplice, if, having been informed of it, I had not again summoned her to my side.

Having been told, a day before their arrival, of the coming of the *procureur du roi* and the *juge d'instruction*, I again refused to fly. I remained strong in my will and in my conscience, and prepared myself to undergo an examination with as little fear as possible. I descended deep into my memory; I sought to recal insignificant circumstances, unperceived

in their commencement, which were tortured by calumny into grave and terrible accusations. I also recommended my servants to seek for the truth, and tell it with exactness.

M. Brugère, remaining near me, could not, from his family position, direct my defence. He called to my assistance M. Saint Avit, his father-in-law, whose reputation as an advocate extended far beyond Corrèze and Limousin. The health of M. Saint-Avit did not permit him to come to Glandier, but he sent me his son, who brought me, with the advice dictated by the experience of his father, the generous and frank sympathies of a young and noble heart. I entrusted him with the letters and papers belonging to M. Lafarge which remained in my possession.

The *procureur du roi* and the judge arrived in the morning. The day passed in the interrogation of Mademoiselle Brun, Denis, and my servants. I was astonished to find that the witnesses communicated freely together, and that they were not allowed to approach me; and that I was, as it were, confined in my own chamber. I only saw Emma and Clementine, and them not until after they had made their depositions.

My poor Emma was troubled and in despair ; she knew not what to make of the box of gum which she had taken from the pocket of my apron, and in which M. Fleyniat had discovered arsenic.

Emma could not determine to place it in the hands of the *procureur du roi*—she believed me lost by her fault, and wept : full of fears, regrets, and dark apprehensions, I comforted her, by telling her the poison was far more likely to exist in her uncle's imagination than in the unfortunate box ; but not daring to take upon myself to give her advice, I pressed her to trust her secret to M. Brugère. The determination of our three united consciences was, that the box should be placed in the hands of justice, to shelter ourselves from remorse and suspicion, by acting without deceit, by telling the whole truth, as well that which could injure me as that which might save me. My examination commenced at eight in the evening, and lasted three hours.

I had previously thought that I should only have to answer questions connected with the poison, and felt myself firm and bold ; but when I saw all my past life unveiled by the

cold inquiries which sought to bare my very soul, I could scarcely contain my indignation, or conquer my despair. I felt the tears roll from my eyes—I felt an icy hand weighing on my thoughts—I could scarcely stammer out a few words; and only regained my self-possession when I had to answer accusations as to the odious and material facts of the poisoning alone.

Our actions belong to men, but our thoughts to God alone! So long as those thoughts have not wandered to the lip, been written on parchment, or translated into actions—so long as they have not embodied their joy, their grief, their souvenirs, or their regrets but in the abyss of our soul, they should be tameless, free as the stars of heaven, and far above the despotic inquisitions of the law.

The words of the *juge d'instruction* did not allow me long to doubt his prejudices. I saw that the examination of the witnesses had been less directed to discover the guilty one than to convict and crush the one they had prejudged already. I do not think that there was a feeling of hatred actuating M. la Ch.; but there

are some understandings too confined to lodge two conflicting ideas at one time. The Lafarge family had first occupied his head, and I now rapped in vain at the gate of the magisterial brain.

The *procureur du roi* fulfilled his painful duty towards me with a gentle and sad compassion; he had consideration as great as my misfortune. I was alone with him when he announced to me that I was to be transferred by the police to the prison at Brives. Indignant, I immediately rose from my chair, as if to protest my innocence. I fell back mute, chilled, stifled by the fatality of my destiny. I believe I should not have lived ten minutes in this state, if a tear, which fell upon the cheek of my good and loyal prosecutor, had not restored me the faculty of weeping. M. Rivet took advantage of that moment to promise me all the kindness in his power. He gave me three days to endeavour to obtain the favourable interference of the *procureur général*. He told me how cruelly he felt his duty at that moment; and I found some words to thank him for having so generously softened his

mournful mission—for having fulfilled the severe duty of the magistrate with so much humanity.

This news fell like a thunderbolt among my domestics. Clementine especially was mad with despair; she ran sobbing into my chamber, looked at me, then hid her face that she might see me no more, and shrieked with indignation and grief. Emma, who had left me in despair, came back to me. I was astonished at her calmness.

“Clementine,” she said, “they have permitted you to go to prison with her. I also shall accompany her for some days.”

“Oh, God be praised! I feel that I may live,” I cried, pressing in my arms these two noble creatures. “So long as I am loved, I can suffer without despair, and without weakness. But, dear Emma, my good guardian-angel, can I allow you to undergo the fatigues, the humiliation, of the journey? and you my kind Clé, know you what a prison is, far from your family, from your country?”

Neither of them permitted me to go on. Clementine wept no more; she spoke of our departure with an air almost joyous. She

seemed to forget the misfortune, when they allowed her to share it with me; and the generous girl thanked me for taking her to prison, not willing to hear her devotions spoken of as any thing but very common; and she was almost affronted by my gratitude.

That same day the gendarmes arrived and installed themselves at Glandier. That same day also, M. Brugère, ending his generous and protecting mission, set out for Limoges, in order to procure from the *procureur général* permission for me to remain in my own house, under the guard of a file of gendarmerie. This journey had no result. He found M. Dumont-Saint-Priest, already greatly prejudiced against me. Magnaud, Buffière, and Denis had instilled their calumnies into his mind.

Several members of his family, friends of Mesdames Buffière and Lafarge, had described to him their touching despair, my cruel and odious conduct. He had no pity for a *monster*.

I expected a refusal, and was not made too unhappy by it. The sad mansion of Glandier appeared every day more deserted and more dreary—I was afraid There had been a crime; there was an assassin! Who was he?

I made Alfred and the labourer Joseph sleep across my door, and yet in the night I started at the least noise. The wind howling through the corridors frightened me. Sometimes even I turned my lips, with trembling, from the drinks which were about to slake my thirst. Oh yes ! I was afraid, dreadfully afraid ; for if the author of the crime had not recoiled from substituting my head for his own on the scaffold, might not events create an interest and an impression which would oblige him to sacrifice himself the victim he had wished to destroy in the name of the law ?

The insolence of Denis was no longer bounded. One evening he entered my chamber in a state of complete drunkenness ; and placing himself opposite my bed, he leant on it, and drew me a disgusting picture of my prison, the brutality of the jailors, the degradation of the women, whose labours, bed, and repast, I should share. Then changing the subject, he advised me to *decamp* ; to procure money, and trust in him ; that he could easily get me beyond the frontier. Lastly, as I raised my head with scorn, and ordered him to leave the room, he went away, murmuring—

“ Yes, *raise it ; raise your princely head.* The executioner will *lower* it for you famously.”

I was so terrified by this scene, that I addressed myself to the gendarmes who guarded me, to pray them to interdict the door of my apartment to that wretched man, who might become dangerous in the brutality of drunkenness. M. de Tourdonnet was in Berry : every one whom I had seen abandoned me in the hour of danger,—all, except Emma, who had become my guardian-angel, and the young advocate with whom I had passed two hours at Tulle. Oh, how I thanked him for having believed in my innocence ! M. Lachaud sent me no common consolations ; but he granted to the poor, humiliated, disgraced woman his devotion and his respect—may Heaven bless him for it !

It was one in the morning when the brigadier of the gendarmerie came to tell me the hour of departure had arrived, and that horses waited us. I had selected and obtained the advanced hour of the night to ride on horseback to Vigeois, where my carriage awaited me.

To leave my chamber I was obliged to cross

that of M. Lafarge. There reigned not there that calm of death which breathes into the heart a consolation and a prayer, but a sad and ominous disorder. I went to kneel beside that bed of grief.

“Charles !” I mentally exclaimed, “Charles ! you see what I suffer—you know my innocence,—from the height of heaven watch over me, enlighten my judges, be the providence of her whom you have loved.”

I rose strengthened, and descended into the corridor, whose sombre vaults, lighted by torches, resounded with the neighing of horses, with their impatient pawings, and with the ring of metal caused by the long sabres of the gendarmes trailing on the ground.

The domestics of the house, my own labourers, the poor inhabitants of our domains, waited for me at the foot of the staircase with sobs and tears. Some seized my hands, others kissed the hem of my gown, while they would exclaim, “Poor lady, may God accompany you and bring you back ! Go ; we well know that it is not you who have caused him to die. We will offer to God *des neuvaines* [nine days’

devotion] for you. Poor woman ! Poor, poor woman ! Must we thus look on your destruction ?”

These touching testimonies of regret and affection did me much good, but made me much worse at the same time. I abandoned my hands to those of these honest men in tears. I embraced these good women, who vowed tapers to the Virgin to obtain my return among them, and who made upon me the sign of the cross.

This scene exhausted me. The brigadier carried, rather than led me, to my horse.

“ Adieu ! adieu ! poor lady ; may God preserve you !” again cried all the good souls who surrounded me.

“ Adieu ! I am innocent. Adieu ! pray for me.”

The rain fell frozen from a starless heaven ; the moon continued veiled in the grey and troubled vapour of the clouds ; and the groaning wind whirled the dead leaves of the chestnut-trees around us. I had let the reins fall upon the neck of Arabska, who paced slowly on, with lowered head. I had one of my hands in that of Emma, and wept bitterly.

After two hours, the peasant who acted as our guide lost his way; the gendarmes did not know the road, which, always very bad, was now a bog or a torrent; and I was compelled myself to serve as a guide along the road which perhaps conducted me to death.

This necessity of watching over the safety of others; the thoughts of danger, always alluring and sweet when life weighs heavy on the heart; the motion; the excitement,—calmed the agony of the departure. The rain had soaked through my dress. An honest gendarme covered me with his cloak, and deprived himself of his large gloves to warm my chilled hands; and after five hours' journeying we arrived at Vigeois. The excellent man reminded me that Clementine had recommended me to his care, and he would himself dry and chafe my feet, numbed by the cold.

M. Fleyniat offered to accompany me as far as Brives; I accepted his offer gratefully. The emotions and fatigues of the night had overcome me; it became necessary therefore for us to stop half-way, that I might obtain a few hours' repose; it was consequently already very late when we arrived at Brives.

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My arrival was expected. The populace crowded round my carriage; shouts, laughter, gross and insulting words fell on my ears. The prison-door opened; at the sound of the bolts I involuntarily recoiled; I made two steps backwards, then, collecting all my strength, with desperate courage I crossed the threshold of my tomb!

THE END.

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